



THE
HIGH
TOBY

H.B. MARRIOTT
WATSON



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THE HIGH TOBY

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

GALLOPING DICK

CAPTAIN FORTUNE

SKIRTS OF HAPPY CHANCE

THE ADVENTURERS

TWISTED EGLANTINE



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BUT, BEING BY THE DOOR, HE SWEPT IT OPEN WITH A MOVEMENT,
AND BACKED INTO THE PASSAGE

THE HIGH TOBY

BEING FURTHER CHAPTERS IN THE LIFE AND
FORTUNES OF DICK RYDER, OTHERWISE
GALLOPING DICK, SOMETIME
GENTLEMAN OF THE
ROAD

BY

H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON
Author of "TWISTED EGLANTINE"

WITH A FRONTISPICE BY CLAUDE SHEPPERSON

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To J. M. BARRIE

MY DEAR BARRIE,—It is all but twenty years since we were first acquainted, for if we live till the spring of 1908, our friendship will have reached its majority. Of those far-off days I cherish, as I believe you do, a grateful memory. How many problems had we to discuss, how many ideals had we to satisfy, and how much ambition had we to fulfil! I think you, at least, have gone far to fulfil all yours, who have written your name indelibly in the literature of our generation. That name I am, after the long lapse of years, prefixing to this book of stories, in the hope that they will interest you, and as a testimony to the enduring quality of our friendship.

Yours always,

H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON.

January 1906



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THE HIGH TOBY

UNDER THE MOON

I EVER had the name of one that kept
to himself, nor was bedfellow to none
upon the high toby. 'Tis true enough that
I have mixed in one or two affairs with
others of my kidney, but these were mainly
in my heady youth and when I was raw upon
the pad, and the issues for the more part
were against me. For one, there was that
business with Creech about the King's
treasure chests, the which came near to
hanging of us all through that toad, Timothy
Grubbe. Indeed, I have never cared to
participate in any act that was not of my
own devising, and there was none on the
road that I would ha' pinned my faith on—
no, not even old Jeremy Starbottle, that
was hanged afore my time. For this reason
it was that I was used to avoid the Ports-
mouth Road, which, being so greatly
traversed, and so set with wastes and wilds,
was pretty much in favour with our gentry.

I was often in the West, where my chief quarry lay, or the North Road was that on which I beat ; but, Lord ! there was no point nor parcel of these shires that knew me not at one time or another, and I warrant I kept the officers all over the country a-jigging. Yet I was once took for an affair near Petersfield, and swore not to touch that road again, but to leave it to the scurvy tiddlers that hold it. I came back, however, once after, and that was upon a late December night, and when the moon was shining and the sky alight and glistening.

I had rode across from Alton with two bottles of good wine under my jacket, and a pocket of gold guineas, and I was trotting across Witley Common whistling of an air, very merry, and with no thought but to come by town the easier, lying maybe by Guildford that night in a cosy private tavern that I knew. Some imp of mischief shook me up and cozened me that night, for I had no intent in the world but to walk like a plain citizen or any talking parson. Yet what happens but this—that I, like a sorry fool, spying of a coach that was running down from the hills with a great clatter, and two postillions before, set up a cry and a hulloo, and ere they or Dick Ryder himself was aware of what he would do, why Calypso was along-

side, I had gotten the reins in my hands, and the nose of my pistol was through the window.

The body of that coach trembled under a concussion of someone that threw himself about within, but there came a voice on that.

“Stay, Nick, you fool, and let’s guess at where we are.”

“‘Sdeath,” says another voice, “I will run this fellow through.”

“Young man,” says I, seeing the moon shine clear upon his face as he peered through the window, “you know not with whom ye are dealing. Heaven rest the soul of them that withstand Dick Ryder!”

At that the other man puts his head to the window also and looks out.

“Oh,” says he, in a quiet voice, “so this is Captain Ryder! I ha’ heard some talk of you, Captain; your name has travelled.”

“Why, yes,” said I, laughing, for this was no news to me; “you will find it from the Quantocks to the Humber, and that with a significance. I tell you, sirs, that Ryder spells terror to those that he chooses.”

“Well, then,” says the second gentleman, eyeing me queerly, “we are now to learn if Captain Ryder does so choose with us poor devils.”

“Stab me!” cries t’other, who was a hot

young blood, "I will snick the rogue through, Avory."

"You will do nothing of the like, Nick," says he, sharply. "Would ye peril our precious lives? Hear ye not that I have some inkling of this gentleman's repute? Gad, I would keep my skin sound, so I would;" and turning to me he smiled pleasantly, beckoning away my pistol that was still directed on the window.

"We are at your mercy, Captain," said he, coolly. "What prize guess you that you have taken?"

"Why," said I, "I give not a groat for prize or no prize. I do what I list, and 'tis my whim to catch a pair of fine cocks thus."

"Well," says he to the other, "I see we must needs open our pockets. I thank Heaven that 'twas you won from me this evening; so I shall lose the less."

He was a tall fellow was this one, with a fair wig and two cold eyes, and he spoke in an equable fashion, with neither a smile nor a frown upon him. Yet he had clearly a command of the other, who prepared to empty his pockets. This set me thinking.

"What," says I to myself, "is amiss with this game cock that he will not venture his spurs?" and I looked sharply on him.

"Captain Ryder," says he, very deliberate,

"there is on our bodies, as I assure you as a gentleman, but ten poor guineas, scant alms for this great office of yours, as I will admit."

"Deliver," said I. "'Twill serve me for some madam in town as well as you."

"That is very true, Ryder," said he, bending his golden eyebrows at me. "Yet consider this. Behind these fine apparels no doubt you will say there is a stout purse somewhere. Ay, so it is. We are upon our way to Godalming, where we lie at the Angel. What! D'ye suppose that any gentleman of the Court would travel abroad so ill provided?"

"What does this mean?" I asked bluntly, looking at both, but very wary; for I trusted him not.

"Look ye, Captain," he answered, showing his teeth, "I am in want of some such brave fellow as yourself, and you shall choose between two courses—whether to strip us of these few and paltry coins or to take service for a noble sum."

"There is some emprise you would do?" I asked surprised.

"Nay, a very easy task," said he, airily, "but one to be well paid, I warrant."

"What price would you put on this job?" said I, considering.

"I believe, Nick, there is one hundred

guineas awaiting at the Angel, is't not ? " said he, turning to his fellow.

He that was termed Nick nodded in a surly fashion.

" 'Tis a nice round bag," said I, " and what should be done for this ? " for I was sick of these approaches, and I liked him not.

" I have a runaway wife," says he, with a faint smile. " Faith, Captain, she is a madcap ; she stalketh by day and by night, and she has taken wings from her dear husband. I would have you to unite us again."

I grinned on him, for I knew what this portended. " Sure this poor lady must be clipped, but where ? " I asked.

" She rides from Midhurst," said he, " and doubtless will pass this way. I had intended with this friend, who is so kind to give me sympathy and his company—I had intended to have catched her myself and brought her to a meeting. But, Captain, you will understand my feelings. My emotions run. I am wax. She were best in your civil hands, that would not imbrue themselves in hasty deeds. You will soothe and dissuade her, I warrant, a man of your tongue. She needs but a sure hand and a cool heart, which I dare not promise. I am disaffected by my passion. I would use an instrument rather."

Again I corresponded with him in a grin, for I guessed at what fellow he was.

"This is very well," said I, "but by your leave I would learn what warranty have I of this payment."

"You have the honour of Sir Gilbert Avory," said he.

I knew him then for what he was, the greatest Cupid in the Court, and one that stood at no hazards to boot. There were tales of this Sir Gilbert, in sooth, upon every wench's tongue. But this was no business of mine.

"Very well," said I, "if 'tis a petticoat you are after I say no more. Faith, I have been about them myself, and I know no greater zest in a pursuit. 'Slife, your worship, I blame you not, and you shall come by your own."

"That is spoken with spirit," he answered, "and now there remains to set you on your quarry. The coach has a green body, and the lady—my lady that is—is crowned with a mass of red hair."

"There was never a nut," said I, "given Dick Ryder but he cracked it i' the jaw."

"Then," says he, smiling civilly out of his broad face, "we have your leave to depart."

"Go in Heaven's name," said I, laughing, "and if I get not those hundred guineas, call me catchpole."

With that I drew off, and the coach rolled away, disappearing into the shining distance ; but I rode back a little distance until I had come to the Half Moon tavern in the middle of that wilderness. Here I sat for an hour or more, hob-a-nobbing with the landlord, and drinking of mulled wine to keep me warm. There was no sound upon the roads in all that time, so that I had grown to fear Sir Gilbert was mistaken, and that the lady was gone another way. A little on eleven, however, there comes a sound from far away, and the landlord sets his ear to the door.

“ ‘Tis a coach,” says he, “ and they drive fast.”

“ They have a need,” said I, with a yawn, “ for ‘tis growing late enough, and indeed, ‘tis time I was upon my road.” With which I called on the ostler for Calypso. By the time I was in the saddle, and standing ready before the tavern in that great open space of the woods, the coach had rolled up and fled past into the night with a huge clamour and the groaning of axles and shrieking of postillions. But in that glimpse of the lights I had seen that the body was of a greenish colour.

I pulled Calypso out on the highway, therefore, and, taking to my pistols, set her to canter sharply across the waste. The coach was flying like a frightened pigeon,

and the lights dwindled afore me, shaking and rocking as they ran. But I was in no hurry, and fetched the mare nearer, keeping her at an even distance. Then it seemed that some suspicion took them, for the moonlight struck full upon me, throwing me out like a black shadow a-riding on them. So the postilions heightened their pace, plying their whips, and when that would not serve, they began to call out, and turned the horses from the highway upon a track that ran among vast and sombre pines. I cried to them to halt, but the fools only increased their terror and their efforts, and the big coach lurched and rumbled over the rough ground, crashing among the branches of the firs, while the horses galloped and leaped in a panic. I put spurs to the mare and went after them, cautiously enough, for the road was darkened by the trees about it. Yet I drew nigh foot by foot, being in no haste, for the wretches knew not whither they rushed. And presently I heard a woman's voice calling angrily and calling loudly, and then there was a stream of oaths from the postboys mingled with some shrill screaming. I came out at that instant from the cover of the firs, and there before me was the coach, sunk to its axles in a marshy place such as are thereabouts, with the devil of a commotion in progress.

“What ado is this?” I cried, coming up and pulling in the nag. But at that the screaming began again, and one of the post-boys levelled a pistol at me. “Put up that toy,” said I, sharply, “or by the Lord I will let light in your brains, you numbskull.”

“Jerry, do as the gentleman bids you,” said a woman’s voice out of the coach, and looking in I saw plain enough that I had here what I wanted. She was a slim-bodied girl with a great canopy of guinea-coloured hair, her bosom moved quickly for all her brave voice. But that gave me a kindly sense of her.

“Who are you?” she says boldly enough, while the maid was still whimpering by her.

“Bless those red lips,” says I, “but who should I be save one attracted by your distress who is come to help you?” She regarded me doubtfully. “Come,” I went on, “let me give you a hand, mistress, for that pretty face will ere long kiss the mud else, which is no business for it.”

She shrank away, but I took hold on her. “Come, come,” said I, “by your leave, pretty miss.”

She trembled, but she kept her face. “I will give you what you wish,” she answered. “Put no finger upon me. Here is my purse. You would not rob my maid.”

“ ‘Tis not your purse I want,” said I, laughing, “ but your person, my dear.”

“ Oh,” she cried out in alarm ; and then, “ Had not these cravens refused my commands we should be galloping into Milford and not thus at your mercy.”

“ I would ha’ gone, not only to Milford, but to the gallows, for that sweet face,” I said, bowing.

“ What would you do with me ? ” she asked, now all of a flutter. “ Know you not that I am Mrs Barbara Crawford, wife to Mr Crawford of Grebe ? ”

“ Fie ! ” said I, laughing at her. “ I would be ashamed at your years to talk so ! What does a chit like you know of wives ? ”

She turned red, and then suddenly white, as I haled her from the coach, struggling with me like a vixen.

“ Fire, Jerry, fire,” she cried ; but the lout was too frightened, and so I flung her before me on Calypso, and, with a discharge of my pistol through Jerry’s hat as he fumbled with his blunderbuss, which set up a new alarm, I got out of the marsh swiftly, and was soon striking through the firs towards Milford.

This Mrs Barbara, as she called herself, wrestled like Satan, but presently came to be quiet, and, says she, in a cool voice,—

"I would sit up. Fear not; you have done your will with me."

"There is spirit in this wench," said I, "and I fetched her up on the mare's crupper, where she sat, gaping out into the night.

"You go by blind ways," said she next. "This is not the road."

"Why," said I, "no, or that dulcet voice of yours would call louder than I like. You may squeal, my pretty," says I, "but you are bound upon what path your legs should go."

"And what path is that?" she asked soberly.

"'Tis where all women walk," I answered with a chuckle. "They know the road. I have seen 'em ride that way in troops."

"You have a generous knowledge of the sex," says she after a pause.

"I ha' been in many circumstances," said I, "and I know a stark wench—also, mark ye, I know when one kicks that would be fain."

"I think you mistake me, sir," said she with dignity. "But whither are we set?"

"What you shall see that you shall see," said I, lightly, for I had an acquaintance with women and knew what way was best to take them.

"Sir," says she to me on that, "I have no doubt that you are a man of honour."

"Ay, so it is there you would tickle me?" I cried, laughing. "Gadzooks, so I am, and one to keep my word whenever it is given."

"Then 'tis given against me?" she said, after a moment's silence, and very gravely.

"Faith, but you talk too much," I cried, in an irritation at her persistence. "You shall neither cajole nor trick me, and that's plain enough for you. I have shut my ears afore to many pleading tongues that wagged in dainty mouths. You are none so sweet as to dissuade me, madam, fair though you be."

She was silent again for a time, and then she spoke bitterly. "Ay," said she, "yet 'tis my fairness that has pulled this ruin upon me."

"Why, you gabble of ruin," said I, with a sneer, "as one that wears the buskin. I warrant there is that in you that knows well enough and laments not. I care not what ye think or what ye wish. You shall do my will and no other."

She made no answer, and now we were come to a hamlet upon the back parts of Milford, where a stream ran under a bridge-way and by high cliffs. 'Twas a place called Eashing. Here was an inn that I had once visited, with an old goose-neck for a landlord, and, taking pity on Mrs Barbara (if she were

so called) and her white face, I stopped before the door and, demanding to be shown into a privy room, led her thither.

“ You will have a glass of wine against your faintness,” said I, quickly, “ but I will have no speaking. Raise your voice and you shall learn the worst, and what it is to offend Dick Ryder.”

She said nothing, but sat very still and pallid, watching me with fluttering eyes ; nor would she take the wine I ordered.

“ Drink, my little cockatrice,” said I, with command, and on that she sipped at the liquor, making a pretence.

A little after comes the innkeeper, and, staring on us, beckons me forth with his finger. I stepped into the passage wondering what game this might be, when says he, suddenly,—

“ I recognise you, Captain. Yonder are fine feathers. A precious morsel you ha’ gotten somewhere,” says he.

“ Oh, damn your words,” says I. “ D’ye suppose I left my home to hear this muck ? ”

“ No, Captain,” says he, lowering his voice, “ but there has been a pother on the heaths this past week, and the traps are about. There is one or more in the room behind you.”

At that I whistled and thanked him.

“ I will put the wine in my gullet and muzzle,” said I, not that I cared for the traps, but ‘twas safer for the aim I was making. So I was not three minutes ere I was in the saddle with the girl as before, and we were riding amain for Godalming.

“ You ride hard, sir,” said she, presently ; and when I made no answer, for to say the truth I wanted no more of her voice, and the job for the first time disaffected me, “ I think I should say,” she went on quietly, “ that when you were with the taverner there was one looked in upon me from a further room.”

“ Why d’ye say this ? ” I asked abruptly.

“ He was well armed,” says she, “ and there was another with him. I had but to raise my finger,” she says quietly.

“ Why did you not ? ” I asked in a surprise.

“ I knew nought of them,” she answered ; “ and I know this of you, that you are more honest than you seem, sir.”

At that I laughed, though I will confess the wench took me by her talk, pretty parrot. “ Well, you must know,” I said, “ that those were the officers of the law who watched you, and they would ha’ been glad to lay hands on Dick Ryder.”

“ It may be,” she replied thoughtfully. “ But I regret not. There is that in your face I would rather trust.”

At that I pulled in Calypso. "Look you!" said I, "who are you, and what do you here? I can get no ease of this puzzle. Are ye maid, saint or sinner?"

"Nay, but I am wife and maid, sir," says she, her face deepening with colour; "I am the Mistress Barbara Crawford, that was wed this day at Midhurst."

"What!" cried I, "you are wed this day!"

"Indeed," says she, "'tis so; and now am I stolen away and like to be no longer what I am."

"Where is your husband?" I asked sharply, fixing her with my eyes.

"He was called away almost ere the marriage was finished," she answered distressfully. "There was news brought of his father's illness, and he rode off. Yet was he to meet me this night at Guildford."

For a moment I was silent, for there leaped into my mind a notion of what that rogue, Sir Gilbert Avory, was about, and then—for the creature drew me compassionately, and she was but a chick for all her steady face,—

"By Heaven," says I, "but this is to go beyond me. I spoil no proper sport, not I; and you and your husband sup together to-night, I promise you, so shall ye."

She looked at me somewhat startled, but with a glow of colour on her face.

"I knew you were true, I knew you were true," said she, repeating it, and seizing of my hand.

"Oh, faugh," says I, "I am well enough," for it irked me to think for what I had taken her all along.

"Will you tell me," she asked in a hesitating voice, "who was it that put you to this?"

"You are welcome to that," I returned bluntly. "'Twas Sir Gilbert Avory himself."

She sighed. "So I had guessed," she said. "He has persecuted me a full year, and no doubt 'twas he that drew off my husband."

That, as I knew, was like enough, but there was no time to fall discussing of Mr Crawford nor Sir Gilbert neither. The hour was late and we must be pushing.

"You will take me back?" says she, softly.

I broke out laughing. "Lord no!" says I. "Bless your bobbing heart, d'ye think you will find the coach still a-sticking in the mud?"

"You will ride then to Guildford?" she asked with some diffidence, and regarding me beseechingly. "'Twould try your generosity to do this for me."

“ Ay,” said I, “ we ride for Guildford, but by way of Godalming.”

“ What ! ” she cried, stricken with fear, “ you would carry me where that man lies ! ”

“ 'Twas that very maggot was in my head, mistress,” I said ; for indeed I had taken a notion to have the laugh of this same smiling beau.

She clasped her hands, and would have appealed to me, but I broke in sharply on that silly pate. “ Faith, you must render yourself to me, or I will none of it. I make my plans and so abide. You shall come off with a sound skin, and cry ‘ pap ’ to your husband. Have no fears.”

To this soothing she said nothing, and presently we resumed our journey, and, getting into the town, pulled up afore the Angel. It was now close upon midnight, and there was but one light in the inn, which shone from a room above. Mrs Barbara looked on me in alarm when she saw this, but she still said nothing. As for me, I left the mare standing—a trick she was used to—and pressed up the stairway with the girl. It was not my design to seek Sir Gilbert Avory for the nonce, as I had other work to do ; but, as it fell, the matter was taken out of my hands, for the man himself met us at the stair-head smiling and courteous.

"I give you welcome, madam," says he, bowing with ceremony. "There is a chamber all prepared for you, and a warming supper. You must ha' gotten a rare appetite with the winds."

She returned him no word, but shrank away towards me ; and says he to me,—

"I fear my lady has lost her tongue i' the cold. You have had a rough journey ; but 'tis well done. I swear the lady was never in more careful custody," and a little smile illumined his even features.

As we had come upon him there was nought to do save to make the best of the case, and though I will admit that at first I was put about I soon recovered my wits, and entered the chamber with him, whence the light shone, with some merry jest on my tongue.

Here was a table spread very generously, and some wine heating by the fire.

"By the Lord," said I, "I am fain of good liquor."

"You have earned it, Captain," says he, pouring forth a glass, but keeping his eyes on the girl.

I drained the glass. "And now," says I, "to business, Sir Gilbert."

"Ay, to business, sir," says he, and, with a gentle motion of his hands, he would

have invited Mrs Barbara to an inner room. "These coarse facts are not for a lady, Ryder," says he.

"Seeing the lady is a main pawn in this business, by your leave she shall stay," said I, with a laugh.

"Why, yes," he says, controlling his lips into that little smile, "she is certainly of chief importance. But I would rather call her Queen, Captain."

"Call her what you will," said I, bluffly. "'Tis all you shall do with her, my master."

He turned slowly from considering her, and gazed on me quietly.

"Ha!" says he, without showing any perturbation, for he was a man of spirit, and he must have suspected that something was wrong. "Here we have a riddle for tobymen. What is the explanation, sirrah?"

"Very simple," said I, grinning at him. "I ha' made the lady's acquaintance, and ha' taken a fancy to her myself."

He raised his eyebrows, while he looked from one to the other of us, as though he would disentangle my real intention.

"I fear me you have been drinking, Ryder," said he, pleasantly.

"True," said I, "but none so deep as you think."

“Would you go back on your bargain?” he asked, bending his brows on me.

“Nay,” said I, “I will take no unfair advantage of any man, huff or Bishop. We shall stand both of us where we stood, you and I.”

“And where is that?” he asked as quietly as before.

“Upon the heath,” I answered. “I had you under my hands, you and t’other, and there were ten guineas atween you, so ye said. Well,” said I, “I will have those guineas and cry quits with you.”

“Ten guineas, was it?” he says, considering—“ah, so ’twas. I would not cheat you, Captain Ryder,” and smiling softly he drew a bag from his pocket. “I perceive you to be a man of honour,” says he, equably. “I love to do business so! Sure, if there were more such at Court! Ten guineas, say you, Captain? Keep your tally,” and he paid out the pictures on the table afore him.

I took them up with a nod, where I sat, but the girl, Mrs Barbara, watched us from the distance, standing with her arm resting upon a tall chair to support her.

“Then here’s your good health, Sir Gilbert,” said I, wondering what method he would take; for I was sure enough that he had a design against me.

“Now,” says he, “we are quits, as you say; and that leaves us free, you to go your way, and me to ask the offices of the law to recover that which is stolen of me. Nick,” cries he in a clear voice, and at the word the young fellow’s nose was through the door. “An officer from the justice, Nick,” he says. “I have been robbed,” and smiled pleasantly in my face.

Now I will confess that this predicament had not occurred to me, for to say the truth, I had a thought that he would fall on me with his weapon, which I minded not, being as good a swordsman as ever any chamber knight in town. And on that astonishment followed also these sequels in my mind—that if so be he carried out the plan he had, I should not only go to the jug, but he would have the wife that was maid. This put me in a frenzy, yet I dared not attack him with Nick outside, and I knew not what other also. So, very quickly making my resolution, I broke out a-laughing, and said I,—

“ You have me held, your worship, by Heaven you have. Yet I was but jesting. Am I a fool to peril a hundred guineas for a chitty face? Come, here are your ten guineas. Pay me down my price, and there stands your madam for you.”

He cocked his eye on Mrs Barbara, smiling

the while, as if pleased with his victory, but mightily civil.

"Madam," he says, "you will see that I have no responsibility in this insult. 'Tis the gentleman's manner, no doubt. I can but think myself fortunate to deliver you of his custody."

But she stood where she was, white and fearful, throwing her troubled eyes about; and part of her terror was no doubt feigned, but I think that in part it was earnest. She knew not, poor wretch, what I would be at.

But, Lord love you, I had no fears. "The hundred guineas," says I, "and I pray Mr Nick for witness," for I was resolved to get that young bantam into the room forthwith.

"Ho, Nick!" says Sir Gilbert, merrily. "Come in for a witness to me," and in steps that young and elegant ninny, looking very sour and sleepy. Sir Gilbert pulled out his bag and counted the money to me. "'Slife," says he, with a frown, "'tis like the thirty pieces," and then he shrugged his shoulders.

I took 'em up one by one, and with the very movement in which the last was taken to my pouch out slipped my sword, and,—

"Defend ye, defend ye," said I, "or I will run ye through. D'ye think to get even with Dick Ryder, you fool, you?"

Sir Gilbert started back and lugged out his iron, and Master Nick leaped forward.

“ Let be, Nick, let be,” says t’other. “ The fellow shall have his way, devil take him ! He shall feed the crows some way.”

But in the course of my life I have never come upon any, save one, that was more than the match of Dick Ryder, and so he soon found. For he plied his point elegantly, but with no proper freedom ; and presently down comes I with my favourite twist and took him through the left breast. He fell a-bleeding to the floor.

“ Curse you ! ” he cried and gasped. But Nick then sprang at my throat with his weapon drawn ; yet was I no such lambkin to be took unawares by such a raw smooth-face.

“ What ! ” says I, “ d’ye fancy that such as I will take thought to drill holes in veal ? Not I, young master, not I,” and dodging his point I drove the hilt of my rapier hard upon his forehead. He dropped like a shot partridge ; and giving neither any further thought I turned to the lady.

“ Fly ! ” says I, “ down the stairway, mistress, for I have not a blink of wind more within me.”

She ran in terror, and I clattered after her, being afraid lest the noise might have

woke those in the inn. And so, indeed, it proved ; for when we were got into the road, where Calypso stood, a commotion broke out behind us, and I heard Sir Gilbert's voice raised in angry oaths. 'Twas the work of a moment to set the lady on the mare and to leap after her. Calypso has carried heavier burdens than that, yet she has carried none so gallantly or so speedily. And thus it had grown to be scarce one o'clock in the morning on that frosty night when we reached Guildford in company, and drew up at the Red Lion.

THE DRAPER'S NIECE

'TWAS late of night when I reached Wimbledon Common, out of the West, where I had been patrolling the roads for some two months or more, and with mighty little success, as it chanced that year. I love the West Country, not only because I have, as a rule, found there fat pockets jogging home untimely on a nag, or fine noblemen in rich chaises, very proud but tender to pick, but I have also a sentimental leaning towards that part, and that's the truth I will not deny. There is some that hanker after the Great North Road, and boast that there is no better toby-ground than 'twixt Stevenage and Grantham, while I have even known 'em to set up Finchley Common or Hounslow for choice. Old Irons, who never had much self-respect, and was not above turning common crib-cracker if it so served him, was wont to go no further than Finchley when he was lacking a goldfinch or two.

"Sink me!" says he in my presence once to the landlord of the King's Head, who spoke

of his score there, “ I will pay you to-morrow, and be hanged to you ! ” The which he did, sure enough, by a visit to Finchley and not so much as a charged pistol. That was never my way. I never could abide such sport. Give me a creditable fellow that shows fight and gives your wits some exercise. There’s the true spirit in which to take the life of the road. I would not give a pint of mulled ale for it else.

But the West is after my heart, being big and populous and swarming with squires and comfortable warm folk. I know the North Road, and was once very well known there myself, and celebrated on the Yorkshire moors, a confounded cold, uncivil place. Indeed, there are few parts of the kingdom I have not traversed in my time. Well, I was newly out of the West that May night, but on this occasion in no very good humour, as you may imagine, when I say that I had been forced to leave a belt of guineas behind at Devizes—so close upon me were the traps. Indeed, I was very nearly taken in the night, all owing to the treachery of an innkeeper, roast him ! 'Twas a fine, mild night, and I was for lying in Clerkenwell at a house I knew, but I had reached no further than Roehampton Lane, when of a sudden I reined in, for I remembered an inn there that

I had sometimes used, and, to say the truth, I was thirsty.

“ Well,” thinks I, “ maybe I will lie here and maybe not. I will let fortune decide,” and I was turning the mare into the lane, when something comes up quick in the thick of the darkness, and rushes upon Calypso’s rump.

The mare started and backed into the hedge, and I raised my voice and cursed, as you may guess.

“ Why,” says I, “ you toad, you muck-rake, you dungfork—” and the Lord knows where I should ha’ gotten to if a gleam of white in the blackness had not in that instant disclosed to me the blunderer. ‘Twas a woman, or, at least, a slip so young and silly that maybe she should not be so styled ; and I had no sooner made that out and ceased in the middle of my objurgations, than I made another discovery. It was her voice that did it, for no doubt she was mightily in terror, seeing me so wrathful and the night being so black and lonely.

“ Oh, sir,” she calls in a trembling voice, “ I did not see—I—” and here she broke a-weeping.

Well, Dick Ryder is not the man to stand by while a pretty woman weeps (for I could have sworn she was pretty enough), and so

down I popped off Calypso and approached her.

"Why," said I, "I love not to see a miss like you in tears, and as for my words, pray forget them. I thought you was some blundering, hulking bully that was meat for my bodkin, or my whip, if no more. But as it is," says I, "there's no more ado. So dry your eyes, my dear, for I am no ogre to eat pretty children."

"Oh," she says, with a gulp, "I was not afraid of you. I only feared I had angered you justly."

"Oh!" I said, trying for a look at her face in the darkness. "Why, I see you are a very brave girl, for sure. That I'll swear you are. And if those pearly drops be not for me, why, I should like to know what opened the wells, my dear? and then I will see if you have broken the mare's leg with your onset, and get on to bed like any honest, sober man that leaves the witching hours to maids and misses and innocent children, as is only right and proper."

I do not suppose the girl took me, for women have but scant appreciation of irony, but she spoke glibly enough.

"I—I am thrown out into the night, sir!" she cries. "I have nowhere to go!"

Now you may imagine how this touched

me, and what I felt ; but she was innocent as a lamb and as foolish, as you might detect from her voice, to say nothing of her face, the which I saw later. So I considered a moment.

“ That’s just my case,” said I. “ And I was going to wake up some fat villain, to take me in and sup me. But,” says I, “ if you will find me the particular villain, fat or lean and cock or cockatrice, that has thrown out a ba-lamb like you, miss, well, ‘tis he or she I will have awake and out, and something more beside, rip me if I don’t ! ”

I had put her down as a child from her stature, which was small, and her body, which was slight, but I was to be undeceived in that presently.

“ ‘Tis my uncle,” she sobbed. “ He has shut the door on me. He will not let me in. He vows he has done with me.”

“ Maybe,” said I, “ he has some cause for his anger. But uncles are not hard masters even to young misses that know not the world nor their own minds.”

“ Nay,” she says, “ he has a reason for his anger, and he will not relent. He has threatened me before, and he is full of burning fury. He will not have me back,” she said in a voice of hesitating timidity ; and, seeming of a sudden to have taken in the

shame of her situation, she began to withdraw into the night.

"Not so fast, young madam," said I, "you have broken my mare's leg, I believe, and I must have a talk with you. What's the reason?" says I.

She paused, and then in a tremulous quick voice said, "He will not hear that George Riseley shall marry me."

"Oh, ho!" said I, "I begin to smell powder. And he has turned you out of doors?"

"No," she faltered. "He would not admit me."

"I begin to see beyond my nose," I said; "you were walking with this George, and returned late?" She hesitated. "Why, come," I said, rallying her, "I'd ha' done the same myself, although you would not credit it of a prim and proper youth like me. You was back late?"

"Yes," says she in a low voice.

"Well," said I, "old hunks shall take you in, never fear; so come along of me, and show me where Nunky lives and fumes and fusses."

At that I threw Calypso's bridle over my arm, and began to go along the road, the little miss walking by my side, something reluctant, as I guessed, but cheering as she

went. Her uncle, says she, was a draper in the city with a good custom and a deep purse, while this George was but a 'prentice with small prospects.

"Well, I have no prospects myself," said I, "but I warrant I can get what I want in the end. 'Tis the same with George. Let him worry at it as a dog a bone. I'll wager he is a handsome fellow to have taken a pretty girl's eyes."

"He is very handsome," says miss, with enthusiasm; "and he is the best judge of calico in the city."

"Damme!" says I, smacking my thigh as we walked on together quite friendly, "damme! that's the lad for my money, and I don't wonder at you," said I.

Whereat, poor chit, she brings me forth tales of her blessed George's goodness and estimable virtues, and how his master trusted him, and how his neighbours loved him.

"Well," I said, "best let 'em not love him too much, or maybe this paragon will slip you."

And on that she came to a halt, and falling very tremulous again, pointed at a house.

"'Tis my uncle's," she says, "but there are no lights and he is gone to bed."

"So shall you," said I, and forthwith went up and banged upon the door.

Now I could guess very much what had happened in that house, and how old hunks had taken a fit of choler and, choking on it, had sent his niece packing for a peccadillo. To be sure she was out over-late for virtuous maids, but what's a clock in the balance with lovers' vows ? And if any was to blame, 'twas this same George that should have been swinged, not pretty miss like a dove. Thought I to myself—old hunks slams the door in an Anabaptist frenzy, and, presently after, while setting on his night-cap and a-saying his prayers, remembers and considers what a fool he is, and how the girl is under his authority and malleable, and that he has pitched her into the roads to come by what she may on a lone night. What does that come to, then, but this, that Nunky sits uneasy, and a-tremble at the first knock, and ready to open and take miss to his arms ? Well, I was right about the readiness to open, but as for the rest you shall hear.

The door comes open sharply, and there was an old fat fellow with a candle in his hand, glaring at me.

“ Who are you ? ” says he, for my appearance took him by surprise.

“ Well,” says I in a friendly way, “ I'm not Old Rowley, nor am I the topsman, but

something in between, and what that is matters nothing. But I found a poor maid astray on the heath, and have taken the liberty to fetch her home safe and secure."

He pushed his head further out, holding the candle so as to throw the light into the road. "It's you, Nelly!" said he, sharply. "Have I not said I have done with you? Go to your lover, you baggage!" and he made a motion to pull to the door, but my foot was inside.

"Softly," said I, "softly, gaffer. This is your niece, I believe," nodding over my arm to miss.

"Well," he snarled, "as she is mine and not yours I can do what I like with her."

"Oh! is that how the wind blows?" said I. "Then, sink me! but I shall have to go to school again to learn morals. But there is one thing I have no need to learn again, and that's how to knock sense and discretion into a thick head," said I, meaningly, and at the same time I threw the bridle over Calypso's ears and stood free before the old villain.

He looked at me a moment, the flame of the candle wagging before his face, and the grease guttering down the candlestick. "You do not understand, sir," he said in a quieter voice. "I have to give my niece

lessons ; I have to teach her by severity ; but since it is probable that she has been sufficiently frightened by this night's adventure, and come to reason, let her enter." And so saying, he stepped back and held the door wide.

That he was of a savage, uncontrollable temper was evident, but I had not reckoned with the old bear's cunning, and I vow I was to blame for it. So old a hand as Dick Ryder should not have been caught by so simple a trick. Yet he was miss's uncle, and how was I to suspect him so deeply ? At anyrate, the facts are that, on seeing him alter so reasonably, and step back with the invitation on his lips and in his bearing, I too stepped back from the doorway to leave way for miss to enter. Then of a sudden bang goes the door to, shaking the very walls of the house, and a great key is turned on the inside, groaning rustily.

I will confess I felt blank, but I recovered in a moment, when out of the window above the old rascal stuck his head.

" Let her go back to her lover ! " he says with a sneer. " Or maybe you can take her yourself. I want no soiled pieces in a Christian house," and then the head was withdrawn, the window shut tight, and the house was plunged in darkness.

You may suppose how this usage annoyed me, who am not wont to be treated in so scurvy a fashion, or to come out of any contest so shabbily. I was, on the instant, for flying at the door and employing barkers and point forthwith, but it is not wise to leap too soon with your eyes shut, and so I held my temper and my tongue, only showing my teeth in an ugly grin as I turned to Mrs Nelly.

"Why," says I, "the old buck has said the truth. And there is something in his whimsies after all. It seems that George and I must fight or toss for you, my dear." You must remember that I had not seen her face all this time, for all the streaming candle the old gentleman carried, but I gathered that she was in distress from the note of her voice, which trembled.

"You cannot mean it, sir," she cried, and shrank away into the darkness, whence I caught the noise of sobbing.

"Why, bless you, child," said I, touched at the exhibition of her weakness and innocence, "such chitterkins as you are no meat for me, pretty as you be, I'll swear. No, you're for George, or may I perish ! I would as leave mishandle a sucking babe as pink-and-white-and-fifteen ; so I would, child."

"Sir," says she, staying her tears, and

speaking with an air of dignity, vastly entertaining, "I am past eighteen."

"Well," says I, "if you are so old as that, I would I had a mother like you, granny. But as for old Suet yonder, rip and stab me if I do not pay him back in gold coin before two hours is out! And in the meantime you come along with me, grandam."

I think she was confused and fluttered to be so addressed, not understanding my sarcasm; but she followed me obediently, not having any ideas of her own, poor soul. I led the way towards Roehampton, where I had made up my mind she should lie meanwhile in the care of a wench I knew at the inn. I was fashioning in my mind a plan for the confounding of the old tub-of-lard as I went, for I never lose time, but am speedy at my aim; yet all the same I talked with miss pretty jovial, for she was a shrinking slip of a girl who was beginning now to get scared, and no wonder. When we were got to the tavern I came into the tap-room and called out for Costley, who had the house then, but is since dead of good liquor; and out runs he in his apron, with a lively face, for he was in a merry state enough, the hour being late.

"What, Dick Ryder!" says he in surprise.

"Yes, 'tis Dick Ryder!" says I; "and

he wants a bed along of Sally for a little madam, and supper for both."

"A madam!" he calls out, and laughs broadly. "'Tis unexpected orders, Captain," says he. "At least 'tis put in an amazing odd way. But," he cries out, bursting with his news, "Old Irons is here!"

"What! that old damber," said I, annoyed, for I was no friend to Old Irons.

"Yes," said he, eagerly, "you'll sup along of him?"

"Damme, I won't!" said I. "I want no cutpurses in my company."

"Come, Captain," says he, protesting, for he had a fear of me, and knew of my repute on many roads. "Fair play and equality in a trade," says he.

I was on the point to give him the rough edge of my tongue—for it was like his impudence to try cozening me—when down the stairs into the passage came a man, walking very stiffly, and with his head in the air. I stopped at once, for I knew not who he might be, and down he stepped into the light, showing a foppish sort of a face, hair very particularly curled, and a becoming dress. No sooner did I clap eyes on him than I knew what kidney he was, and that he was not worth two blinks of the ogles, as they say. So I turned my back on him and was

beginning on Costley again, when I was surprised by the girl's voice crying out from the entrance behind me.

"What the devil?" says I, flying about, for I thought she was insulted maybe by some of Costley's fellows, and I ran to the door. But there was she with her arms about the neck of this Jack-a-dandy.

"What's this, miss?" said I, beginning to think there was some truth in old Nunký's words after all; and at that she stepped into the inn, in her excitement, and I saw her plainly for the first time. Lord! there was nothing in her face that would not have convinced any Court at Old Bailey forthright. She was prettily handsome, like a doll that turns eyes up or down and smiles out of pink cheeks, in which were two dimples mighty enticing. Up she comes in a rush, almost breathless, and breaks out to me,—

"'Tis he; 'tis he, sir!"

"Who the devil is he?" said I, sharply.

"'Tis Mr Riseley," she says, somewhat abashed. "He has been supping here, and is setting forth for his lodging."

"I commend his discretion," I said dryly; "an excellent good place for supper, so it is, specially for young bloods like that. Well," says I, "since you're content, as it seems, I

will leave you and young Cupid, and be about my business."

At that she looked dumbfounded. "But—" she begins, stammering, and paused.

I threw a glance at Riseley, who stood by with an air something 'twixt arrogance and uneasiness. I plumb'd his depths, for I have come across many such as he in my time—fine feathers enough and nothing behind 'em. But it was true that the coxcomb's appearance did not better her case, beyond the titillation of mutual affection; so I considered, and the idea I had taken suddenly bloomed forth in my mind. There was Old Irons, and here were we. I could have laughed aloud to think how I was for binding all the threads in one, to say nothing of Nunkys, on the Common. So I turned about to Costley.

"I was wrong," says I; "I will do Captain Irons the honour to sup with him, and this young gentleman, I make no doubt, will join me."

"I beg your pardon—I—I have supped," he stammered.

"'Tis a friend," I heard her whisper: "if it were not for him I know not what must have happened to me."

"Well," says I, "miss here will sup at

anyrate," at which I saw his colour move.

"I will take the pleasure myself to keep you company, sir," said he, and forthwith we marched into the room. Here was Old Irons, rude, jovial, and blatant as ever, but happily not too far gone as yet. He stared at my guests hard enough, but seemed to be at a loss what to make of them or how to deal by them. So that he was for a time pretty silent, casting glances of perplexity at me and frowning, as if he would invite me to say what I was doing. He was drinking, however, of humpty-dumpty, which soon loosened his tongue.

"What cock and pullet have ye got here, Dick?" says he in a loud whisper.

"Friends of mine," says I.

"Oh!" says he, and stared; then passed off into a chuckle, with his eyes twinkling on miss; at which my apprentice in the fine clothes, not knowing, poor fool, what sort of man he had to deal with, fired up and demanded haughtily why he laughed at a lady. But Irons only roared the more, paying no more heed to him than if he were a babe in arms.

"Shut your mouth!" says I to him, seeing the girl's colour fly about.

"Why," says he, on the grin still, "you've

turned Anabaptist, Dick. What fad's this ? I will say it's as toothsome and sweet mutton as—”

“ If you close not your cheese-trap,” said I, sharply, “ I will take leave to do it for you with my pistol-butt.”

At that Old Irons stared at me, for he was never very quarrelsome save in his cups, and he had a respect for me. “ Captain,” says he, “ don't go for to say you're going to commit assault on Old Irons, and shut his pretty peepers for ever. I'll warrant this pretty lady would be affrighted by it, and the gentleman too, rip me ! when they see Old Irons a-lying in his gore—”

“ Oh,” says I, impatiently, “ have done and pull up, for I maybe shall want you afore the day comes.”

“ Now that's like Dick Ryder's own self,” said the old fool, and feigned to wipe a tear from his eye and regain his spirits. He whistled a snatch, and called for more ale and brandy, which was his favourite drink.

“ I will now proceed to deliver a toast, Captain,” says the dirty old rogue, holding his beaker up and ogling towards miss. “ Here's to the beauty of Roehampton—rip me ! no—of Putney Heath to Kingston ! Toast me that, Dick.”

I let him drink his toast, for I did not wish

to thwart him too much in view of what I intended later, and he continued in a wheedling tone to address the girl, asking if she was not the Duchess of this or my Lady that, and feigning to inquire after his friends at Court in a mincing, fashionable voice that was grotesque to hear. But at last I stopped him, for I thought it was time to come to business, and moreover, Old Irons had taken enough within his jacket for my purpose.

"Irons," says I, "a man of heart and tenderness like you would be all agog to do service to a young lady that was in trouble," and I winked at him meaningly across the table.

"Service!" says he, starting up, "why, I've just been pining, Dick, all this time for you to come to it. 'What's Dick got?' says I to myself, and says myself to I, 'Maybe (and I hope) he will be for letting me strike a blow in behalf of youth and beauty?' Stab me, Dick! those was my very words to myself."

"Well," said I, bluntly, "you shall have your wish, old man, and this young gentleman too, who I see is regularly jumping for to join us."

"I—I know not what you mean," stuttered the peacock. "Having supped, and being called on to retire to my lodging, which is

far hence, I will take the opportunity to thank you, sir, for your hospitality, and begone."

Now at that I was only confirmed in the opinion I had formed of him as nothing but a cur of no spirit: for here he was willing—nay, anxious, to fly off and leave his lady in the hands of those whom he knew not, with never a roof to cover her. He had taken a fear of Irons, maybe, or perhaps his suspicion was due to my masterful air. But I was not going to let him escape that way, specially as he was part of the plot I was laying against old Nunky. So I put my hand on his shoulder.

"Sit down," said I, cheerily. "You must not begone till you have put something inside of that brave coat of yours. Moreover," says I, "here is a lady in trouble, and if I read your honest face aright, you are not the man to leave a poor maid in the lurch—not you."

"Rip me, no!—he's a brave young gentleman. I can see it in his cheeks," chuckled Old Irons.

"I—I do not know what can be done," said the other, in confusion. "I am willing to help in any way. But her uncle refuses—"

"Well," said I, looking on him attentively,

"you may be thankful that you have met one who, however inferior in courage, does not need to cry mercy to your wits. For here's my plan, plain and pat," and I gave it them, there and then. It had come into my head as I walked along the road with Mrs Nelly, but I had the whole form perfect only when I had encountered the apprentice and heard Irons was in the tavern. Old Irons and I were to make an entry into the house, and the peacock was to make the rescue, by which means, as you will see, the way would be cleared for Nunký's reconciliation with his niece's choice. But no sooner had I told them than cries the peacock, stammering,—

"But—but—I could not—'tis not seemly. I will be no party. 'Tis time I was gone home."

"Oh, very well," says I, "then we will adventure without you, and 'tis I will rescue miss from Old Irons."

The girl's eyes lighted up. "You will do it, George?" says she, beaming. "I believe it will convince my uncle of all that I have said of you."

He hesitated, and being pushed into the corner, knew not what to say.

"But," says he in a troubled voice, and glancing from Old Irons to me, and from me

to Old Irons, anxiously, "I do not know who these gentlemen are. I—"

"Sink me!" says Old Irons in a cozening voice, "d'ye think we are really on the toby? Why, bless you, young master, we are both noblemen in disguise, so we are, and would think shame of this job if it were not to make an honest girl come by her own. We're only a-posing as crib-crackers," says he.

"George!" says the girl, in a voice of soft entreaty that would have persuaded a topsman.

"No good will come of it," said he with an air of protest. "'Twill fail," and he cast up his eyes in despair.

"Agreed like a brave lad!" said I, clapping him on the back; "and you shall drink to us and success," with which I filled him up a pot of humpty-dumpty, well laced.

He drank and coughed, but the compound mounting in his blood, fired him presently, so that he began to talk lightly and proffer advice and boast of what he would do and what part he would take.

"Why, yes," says Old Irons, "a pistol clapped at the head, and bang goes the priming, out flows the red blood. Sink me! there you are, as cold as clay, and with no more life in you than in a dead maggot. 'Slife! here's a jolly boy, Dick, that is handy with his barker, I'll vow."

But I stopped him ere he went too far, and he and I prepared the arrangements. We left miss behind in Sally's charge with strict instructions, and 'twas nigh three before we reached the house. There I set the popinjay outside the window to shiver, pot-valiant, until so be the time should come, while Irons and I went to the back of the house and made scrutiny of the yard. There was little trouble in the job, as it chanced, for Irons is skilled in the business, which I should scorn to be, holding it for a scurvy, mean-livered craft, unworthy of a gentleman. But I was committed to it for this occasion only, and so was resolved to go through with it. Irons fetched out his tools and got to work ; and in a short time we were through the window of the kitchen, and Irons with his glim was creeping up the stairs. But he stopped half-way and whispered back to me—as if he had only then recalled something.

“ What ken's this ? ” he asked, using his cant word.

“ Why, an honest merchant's house,” said I, “ and he traffics in calicoes.”

“ Look ye, Dick Ryder,” says he, sitting down on the stairs, “ I may be dullard, but rip me if I know how you stand in this ! ”

“ Why,” says I, “ you need only know

where you stand, Irons, and that's pretty sure. You know me."

He stared at me a moment, and then said he, "Well, I'll empty old Nunky of his spanks, and we'll settle afterwards," and he resumed his journey.

Now, what I had arranged with the apprentice was that I should knock upon the window when the time was come, at which he would spring in with cries of alarm and fury, falling upon the rascals that had dared break into the merchant's house. At which Irons and I were to make off, and the old gentleman, rising in terror from his bed, should discover us in flight, and his deliverer George, full-armed, in possession. Yet it did not fall out quite in this way, owing, as I believe, to Old Irons's muddled head and his stopping on the stairs.

At anyrate, we were no sooner come to the hall, after Irons had visited two rooms, than we were surprised by the figure of the old gentleman moving down the staircase in his night-dress and a large blunderbuss in his hand.

"Stand!" says he, seeing Irons in the faint light. "Stand, rogue, or I fire!"

Old Irons uttered a curse, and, edging into the shadows, put up an arm to slip the catches of the window. But his knuckles

fell on it with a rap as he withdrew the catch, and immediately after there was a loud, shrill cry, the window fell open, and there was our peacock in the midst, calling in his falsetto,—

“ Surrender, or I will blow a hole in you !
Surrender, by— ! ”

I could have broken out laughing at the sight, only the situation promised to grow risky. For Old Irons, taken aback at this, and never very particular when on his lay, jumped up sharply and smashed at t'other with his pistol-butt ; while, to make confusion worse, the old man in the nightcap let off his blunderbuss. Such a screeching arose as would have astonished a churchyard of ghosts, for the truth was, old Nunky hit George somewhere in his hinderparts, and simultaneously down came Irons's blow on his head. That set his finger to work on the trigger of the pistol I had given him, and ere I was aware, something had took me in the big toe, and set me cursing.

“ Here ! ” says I, grabbing Old Irons in the darkness, for he was ready to destroy both in his wildness, “ this is no place for a tender-hearted chicken like you or me. We're no match for savage fire-eaters like these. We'd best go,” and I dragged him through the window and we made off together. When we reached the inn, I called out the girl.

"What has happened?" she cried eagerly.

"Well," said I, "I think you had best walk home sharp. I'll wager Nunky will be calling for you presently to reward a gallant youth that has risked his life for to save him."

Her eyes glistened, and, Lord! I believe the poor fool thought her George *had* been brave. She clasped her hands. "Oh, I must thank you, sir!" she cried.

"Nay, never thank me," said I, "for, if I mistake not, Old Irons has taken thanks for us both, and would have had more if it had not been for young Jack-a-dandy."

"Split him!" cries Old Irons. "I would I had hit him harder."

"Hit!" she cries, and clutches at me.

"Nay, never fear," I said. "'Twas not Irons, but Nunky's blunderbuss. Faith, he took both wounds like a lamb. I would I had his courage, and was to be comforted like him. But he is in no danger."

"Oh, sir!" says she, gratefully, and if she were fool she was pretty enough, and her innocence touched me, for she had scarce understood anything of what we spoke.

"But run home," says I, "and I'll warrant you'll find him a-rubbing of his head, and Nunky a-hugging him for joy and gratitude."

But even ere I had finished she was gone,

flying lightly into the grey of the coming dawn, and, as I heard afterwards from Costley, what I had forecast was pretty accurate. But I had finished with miss then, and the next business was to divide with Old Irons. 'Twas the first time that I had ever engaged in a job with him, and I vow 'twill be the last ; so scurvy was he in the partition. But, then, I had always a detestation of so ungentlemanly a game as cracking cribs.

MISS AND MY LADY

THERE are few people that can truly say they have tricked Dick Ryder, and fewer still can say that in the end he did not wriggle out of his predicament (whatsoever it might be) and turn the tables on them. Yet of these few one, I will confess, was a woman, and a woman I had eyes for, though I am not fool enough to cast my wits away for a petticoat. I have always admired spirit in the sex, but there is a point at which it degenerates into vice, and of such shrews or vixens I wish any man joy. They are good to be beat if you be so inclined, but for myself I have never taken up stick, lash, or fist against any woman, and never would so long as I am free of the topsman.

The adventure happened when I was by Maidstone in the summer of 1683, coming up from Dover very merry. I had ridden round from Deal and lain at the Crown in Dover the night before, and I warrant I had made the people of the inn open their eyes with what tales I told of Court and Old Rowley

and affairs of State. I cannot say why, but all the way from Deal to London I seemed possessed of a devil that would wag me, whether I willed it or not. I am not used to be so precipitate, but 'twas as if a cask of French brandy had gotten into my brains and set 'em a-quarrelling. At least, I was gay-headed and recked of nothing. Not that I care for any risk or peril under the sun if it be necessary ; but this was to go rollicking, with the gait, so to say, of a drunken man, whistling on danger and leering at fate—a mighty foolish thing to do for any man. There is no question but I would not have fallen into that blunder by Leeds Castle if I had been in any other mood. But there it was—the devil was in me, as I say.

I pulled out of Dover pretty late, and with a parting wave of my hand at as sweet a kinxiewinsky as I have seen, I started on the London Road in good temper and good fettle. But ere I had gone a mile or so, I came up with a little fat, dark fellow that had been at the inn and had listened agog to my tales. It was, "Lord, sir, say you so ?" and "Bless me, I would not ha' believed it!" and then again, "Save us, what shall we hear next ?" Well, this little black man, as it seems, was steward,

or factotum, or what-ye-may-call-it to my Lady Dane, who, also, as it seemed, had lain at Dover overnight, having crossed in a packet from France, and was on her way to Winchester by Reigate and Guildford. The fellow was not given to talking, but more to listening, with his "bless me-s," but he was a simple rustic, and you may fancy that I led him on so that he opened his mouth as wide as I my ears. For this Lady Dane was a rich widow (so he said), and, moreover, a woman that was greatly besought in marriage by many suitors of all degrees, and both for her looks and her money. 'Tis not I that would blame any man that saw his chance to seize beauty and booty alike together. 'Tis the worst of it that they generally go singly—at least, to judge by what I have seen of fine ladies. Well, says the little black man, my Lady Dane was on a journey to her home on the Itchin in the company of her niece, that was daughter to the late Sir Philip's brother, and he was going afore to prepare for them at Maidstone, as they were not yet started. It seemed that my lady had property in Maidstone, and was for giving a water-fountain to the town in her kindness.

"My lady," says he, puffing himself out, "rises late, like any lady of the Court."

"Why," said I, "she must be a rare fine

woman—that she must, from your accounts. I would like to clap eyes on her, so that I might compare her with the beauties ; ” for he was the most obsequious in praise of his mistress that ever you heard, and vexed my soul. “ And the niece,” says I, “ would be pretty handsome too.”

“ The niece ! ” says he, with a gesture of contempt, waving his hands in a foreign way in imitation of what he had seen in France, and thus nearly falling off his nag. “ Oh ! the niece is well enough,” says he, and recovered himself carefully. “ *Je ne sais quoi*,” says he, and shook his head with a mighty knowing look. “ She would do pretty well, but not in a capital, not in Paris or London, where there is need always of the most elegant style. You, sir, with your knowledge of cities, know that. You have the air.”

It tickled me to see the little fool a-sitting uneasily on his big horse, with his toes cocked out on each side, looking for all the world like a radish that would split as he bobbed and bounced up and down upon the saddle, and mimicking foreign airs and tongues and manners as if 'twere natural to him. But I kept a grave face until I had gotten out of him what I wanted, by which time 'twas late in the afternoon (for we had ridden together

all the way), and we were within ten miles of Maidstone. So I bade him good-bye and good-luck, for he was not worth any gentleman wasting his hands on, and, turning the mare up a lane, left him to pursue his way to Maidstone alone. But a mile or so along the lane I pitched on a wayside tavern, where I took leave to rest and refresh the mare and myself while waiting ; for, from what I had gathered from the steward, the lady would make no start before twelve, in which case she would not be in Maidstone before six at the least. So there I sat and waited, with never a companion, and not even a serving-wench to clack tongues with. A little before six I rode down and came into the Maidstone highway near by Leeds Castle, where the moat was shining in the descending sun, and the pastures spread very ample and green to the heights beyond. I waited there for an hour in a convenient copse, and in the end got very tired.

“ Damme ! ” says I, with a yawn, “ this Mother Beauty has overslept herself for certain, and will save her jewels after all ; ” for I was in no mood to wait until the next day for the chance, being due in London. There was the lake, first gleaming with the sun, then with long shadows afloat and stretching, and at the last plunged in vacant

blankness. This was near upon twilight, and I was for cursing myself as a fool to attend upon the whims of a woman, when there was the sound in the distance of rumbling wheels, and I pulled Calypso out and waited by the grassy border of the road.

'Twas not long before the chaise came up, rolling in a dignified way down the hill, and speaking of wealth and consideration in every spoke and appointment. There was the coachman with his fellow beside him, and two spirited horses, and, if you please, by the lackey was a huge and bell-mouthed blunderbuss, like a brass viol. I could ha' yelled for laughter at the sight of them and their brave preparations. Rip me ! what a formidable array 'twas, with two gallant fellows in livery, all ready to blow the soul out of such as Galloping Dick and his kidney ! Why, the first time I ever clapped peepers on 'em I could see that there was no fight in them. So I put the mare right across the way and waited. The twilight was come now, and the coachman called out to me to stand aside.

"Are you drunk?" says he, as he draws up of necessity.

"No," says I ; "I am only a poor fellow that's thirsty and tired of waiting on you, and would like to be drunk," said I.

“ ‘Tis a ‘wayman !’ ” shouted t’other lackey ; and pulled up his blunderbuss. But I put the point of my sword in his wrist, and he dropped it with a howl.

“ What’s this ? ” now cried a voice from the interior of the chaise ; and, pushing the mare to the window, I looked in. There was the lady, sure enough, of whom the little fat man had spoke ; and he had been right about her looks, for in her anger she was mighty handsome. But her companion, that was the niece, according to the steward, was by no means what he had suggested, being a tall girl of a delicate beauty, with a gentle kindness in her eye, very becoming to modest virginity. My lady was in a storm of anger.

“ Who are you ? ” she said furiously.

“ Why,” said I, “ I know not if ‘tis of consequence to your ladyship to discover who it is or who it isn’t that rumpads you, so long as you be rumpadded ; but if it be any convenience to you, why, set me down in your accounts as Galloping Dick of the Roads, and debit me with what you will,” says I.

“ You would rob me ? ” said she, looking at me sharply, and, as I could see, controlling herself with an effort.

“ Your ladyship has a mind that flies direct to the point,” said I, politely ; “ I call

miss in witness of its quickness. Never so much as a word have I spoke afore you out with your guess. ' You would rob me,' says you. Why, damme ! I will not deny a lady."

She looked at me in doubt for a moment, as if she would count me up, and then it was that I got my first idea of her quality, for her gaze pierced me through, and there was capacity in her very bearing.

" You would rob a poor woman ? " said she next, in a softer voice. " I thought 'twas only fat, bloated purses that you gentlemen of the road would steal."

" No," says I, " I take nothing under five hundred guineas, and if there be some jewels to crown the pile I will not refuse them"—for this, I knew from the little fat fool's talk, was what her ladyship carried.

She bit her lip, but still kept her temper.

" I see you are pleased to jest with me," said she. " You gentlemen are as light of heart as of finger. Come, you shall have my twenty guineas, if you are so hard, and I will even refrain my curse, if you will kindly withdraw your head and allow me to proceed"—and at that she thrust towards me a little bag. She was as cool as ever I have seen man or woman, which was the more remarkable, seeing how evil was her real

temper. But I took the bag and still kept my place.

“ Hark you, madam,” said I, for I was not ill-pleased to have a duel worthy of my tongue and skill ; “ Galloping Dick never makes a wanton boast, nor asks what he gets not, nor is afraid of his own mind. There is five hundred guineas with you, the which I will beg of you for a keepsake, and in kind memory also will ask those pretty toys.” And I pointed at her necklace. “ Had I not been kept a-yawning my head off the two hours by the wayside, maybe I would have taken the one and left t’other ; but, sink me ! I am of a mind for both now,” says I.

Again she shot me a glance, and I thought for a moment that she would have shouted an order to her servants, and have driven on and trusted to chance. But perhaps she came to the conclusion that the hazard was too great, as indeed it was, for I would have clapped holes through chaise and coachman ere they had rolled three paces, and her ladyship might have come off in that case worse than I was for leaving her. At anyrate, she did nothing so foolish, but merely uttered an exclamation in which her fury and her chagrin were indicated, and says she, in angry despair,—

“ Will nothing make you give up ? Can-

not I persuade you in any way to use me decently ? Lord forgive you, I thought that the toby had some sense of gallantry."

" By the Lord ! " said I, promptly, " and if there is any huff that says ' no ' to that, I would run him through his midriff. We are no money-weasels, and least of all, Dick Ryder. And maybe that name is known to you, madam," said I.

" Why, I have heard it, sure," says she, eagerly. " And those that have spoken of you have given you a good name, for a brave and chivalrous fellow."

" I have a good repute, and that widely," said I, for 'twas true enough, and maybe she had heard of my adventure with Old Rowley and the Duchess of Cleveland, in which I played a pretty figure.

" Why, of course," said she ; " I recall you now. Your name, Captain, has been bruited about the roads from one end of the kingdom to the other, and it has always come to my ears in good condition. If I recall aright, there was a tale in which you did some good to an honest woman."

" Does your ladyship refer to Mrs Barbara Crawford and to her abduction ? " said I.

" Why," said she, " now 'tis what I did think of, more especially as a great friend of mine acquainted me with the facts."

“ ‘Twas on the York Road,” said I, looking at her, for her glib tongue of a sudden had made me shy at her, like a colt of two years.

“ ‘Twas there, Captain, as I remember now well,” said she.

“ Well,” says I, “ ‘tis strange you should ha’ happened upon some witnesses to that little episode, for I thought it had passed out of mind. But seeing your ladyship is so mindful of me, let me hang if I do not mark it upon my account with you.”

This I said, having discovered how greatly false she spoke, for ‘twas not on York Road, but by Guildford, that the affair happened, and I would swear that she had heard not a word of it, which, nevertheless, she might very well have done, seeing that it was notorious in the town at that time.

“ I am always glad to meet a famous man,” said she.

“ No more than I a handsome lady,” said I. “ And to show how deeply I am in earnest, I will forego half the account and all the jewels for a salutation from miss there.”

To say the truth, I had enjoyed my bout with the lady, and was disposed to be lenient to her for all her airs and sharpness. But the sight of the niece’s eyes of a sudden warmed me and incited me ; for she was looking at me gently, with an odd expression of interest

and of wonder, and her bosom rose and fell swiftly. You may guess that that set it on even a swifter ebb and tide.

“ What d’ye mean ? ” asked her ladyship.

“ I am a gentleman adventurer,” said I, “ and, damme ! I will not deny my calling ; ’tis efficient at the least. But if miss there will permit me the salutation, rip me ! you shall go scot-free.”

At that, miss shrank into her corner, all the expression fled from her face, which was white and stark. But my lady turns on her.

“ Hear you that, Celia ? ” says she. “ Buss and let us get on, since this gallant gentleman must have already delayed himself over-long.”

“ You are right,” said I. “ ’Tis a scurvy long time since I ha’ been waiting here.”

“ If you haste not, Celia,” says she, very ironic in tone, “ the gentleman will be getting impatient—as well he may, seeing your pale beauty.”

Now this (for ’twas nothing but a sneer) set me against her, the girl being mightily more handsome than herself and of a fine frailty. But I said nothing, only looked at miss, who seemed as if she would have withered out of the chaise.

“ Celia ! ” cries her ladyship, sharply

“ You—you must be jesting, madam. You cannot mean it,” says miss in a low voice.

"I have stood much from you, but this insult—"

But my lady broke in, "You will do what I say," she said harshly; "I command you."

"I will not," says t'other. "Indeed, madam, I may not. Ask me not so to violate myself."

Upon that her ladyship turned about. "Hark ye," she said, and whispered in her ear, and upon that, observing her to wince, she said aloud, "What, d'ye hesitate, when 'tis to spare five hundred guineas and some odd jewels, including your own?"

"I—I value not mine, madam," says miss, trembling.

"Well, there is mine," said she, "and if they be of not much marketable value, there is a higher value I put upon them, since they were given me by your dear uncle. You shall save them."

But, Lord! I am a pretty judge of jewels, and she was lying; for there was more worth in her jewels far than in her guineas. But I said nothing, only listened, to hear what miss would answer.

She hesitated, and her ladyship made a peremptory gesture. "Why, 'tis cheap enough," said she, sardonically. Miss still hesitated, and then, as it seemed, on a rap from her ladyship, very white of face and

drawn, leaned across to the window. I saw the large eyes gleam in the faint light, and they were like pools at even in which the stars do set ; but her lips were trembling.

“ I have never bought jewels so cheap,” says my lady with her sneer, thinking, no doubt, that the bargain was struck now and the act consummated.

“ No ! ” says I ; “ I kiss no maid against her will. Fetch forth the pieces and the toys, my lady.”

Miss fell back, still white, and I saw something leap in her eye. She put her kerchief before her face and sobbed.

“ Damme ! ” says I roughly, “ out with the goldfinches, or must I make bold to help myself from ye ? There is too much prattle here, and I have delayed long enough.”

The lady had gone red with anger, and moved her arm as though she would have struck someone in her fury ; but suddenly containing herself, and considering, as I must suppose, that 'twould put no embargo on the guineas and the diamonds, she says, says she,—

“ If my niece will not save my jewels at the price, I, at anyrate, will save hers.” And she leaned softly towards me.

Now in a flash I saw what she intended, and how she would go any length to preserve

her property, the which gave me but a poor thought of her for a basely avaricious woman with no pretensions to honour, and (as was clear) a very brutal mind and temper towards the girl. So I did that which maybe I should not ha' done, though 'tis hard to say, and no one ever accused Dick Ryder justly of handling a woman harshly. But she would have put me in a hole else, with her quickness and her cunning ; and there was only the one way out, which I took.

“ No,” says I, “ there is no talk of miss’s jewels. What she may have she may keep. I war not on pretty girls. And as for yours, madam—damme ! there’s nothing will save ‘em ! No, split me, there isn’t ! ”

She fell quite white, as I could see even in the gloom, and for a perceptible moment hesitated. ’Twas then, I suppose, that she made up her mind, casting this way and that venomously and desperately for a way out.

“ Well,” said she, in a muffled voice, “ I cry you mercy. Here’s what ye are wanting ! ” And she flung her bag at me ; and with her fingers, that trembled, undid the necklet she wore, and handed it to me.

“ Come, that’s the mood in which to take reverses,” says I cheerfully. “ I’ll warrant there’s more where these came from, and

more behind them again ; for I should think shame to rob the last jewel from a neck that so becomes 'em." This I said by way of consolation for her vanity, if that were touched at my previous refusal. But she said nothing to that ; only put her head nearer, and addressed me with a chastened voice,—

"Look ye, Captain, I think you be a hard man, but not so hard perhaps as you may seem. I ask not for myself, as you've taken all I had, but for my niece here, who has had the privilege of your benevolence to retain what she has. You have said your name is Ryder, and I will believe you. 'Tis nothing to me now if it be Ryder or Creech, as—"

"Creech !" says I, for I knew Dan Creech well, and had, indeed, been in some surprises with him.

"Yes, Creech !" said she, looking me steady in the face. "I was warned of a ruffian named Creech that would haunt this road to Maidstone."

"Well, Creech," said I, "will reap nothing from bare acres."

"No," said she, "save from my niece."

And there she spoke truly enough, as I saw ; for if Creech was on that road (and maybe he was), I knew him better than to suppose he would be content with their asseverations. He would rummage and over-

haul, would Creech, and there was never gold or farden would escape Danny's notice, not if 'twas as pitch black as midnight.

"As you have been so generous," said my lady, "I thought that maybe you would go further, and save my niece from robbery and me from further needless alarms. It seems to me, though I may be prejudiced, that you owe me that at least."

I thought on that for a moment, and—well, I had not spared miss to let her fall a victim later ; so says I,—

"You mean that I shall give you my protection ?"

"I see that you are quick of your wits," said she, speaking evenly now, and not with any irony apparent.

"Done !" says I. "I will conduct ye to within a mile of Maidstone, and you shall go secure. I'll swear to that."

"Will ye not be afraid to venture so closely ?" asked she.

"I will conduct ye up to the doors of Maidstone," said I. "Damme ! I'll see you safe within the precincts."

"Spoken like a brave knight of the roads," said her ladyship, and lay back in her seat. "And now, perhaps, you will be good enough to bid my coachman drive on."

There was something in her tones which

should have given me pause even then, if I had been less pleased with myself. But I had been hard with her, not in the matter of the jewels only, and I was disposed to meet her on a point, for all that I was sure she bullied the girl. So I rode on in the front and the coach rolled after me, for all the world as though I were advance guard in protection of beauty, which, after all, is pretty much what I was. There was no denying looks to her ladyship, but she was of a hard, handsome face that has never taken me. You would swear she would never change till the tomb swallowed her, but would grow old and fade white insensibly, battling for her beauty all the way, and holding its handsome ghost until the end. If there was anyone that would be attracted by her person (and there must ha' been many), to say nothing of her purse, why, thank the Lord, 'twas not I. I would sooner lie in shackles at Newgate than have lain in shackles to her at my lady's house. Not but what I can speak generously of her (as witness what I have wrote of her beauty), for I came out of the affair all right, yet by an accident, as you will see.

We had got near by Maidstone, within three miles, and the twilight had thickened into dark. There was never a soul upon the lonely road, for you may conceive that I kept

a sharp eye, not only for Danny, if he should be about, as was possible, but also lest my lady should play any trick upon me by the way. But I was not much afraid of that, as I knew there was nothing between us and Maidstone save a few scattered cottages and an insignificant village or two, which I would have warranted to scare with a blank charge. So when we were, as I say, within three miles of the town, her ladyship put out her head and called to me.

“ See you,” said she, “ there is the town drawing near, and you expose yourself in the front. It will serve if you ride behind and be for your better safety, Captain.”

“ Why,” said I, “ what the deuce do I mind of riding before or behind ! There’s none will take me, and I will fetch ye into Maidstone, as I have said.”

“ Well, Captain,” said she, with a laugh, “ I will confess ‘twas not wholly your safety that moved me, which is not strange in the circumstances ; but I should feel more secure myself were my escort in the rear, from which side ‘tis more likely any assault would be made.”

“ I came at you in the front, madam,” said I.

“ Ah ! Captain Ryder is Captain Ryder,” said she, beaming, “ and was not afraid of

my blunderbusses and my rascals. But conceive a less brave and straightforward adventurer that sees not only blunderbusses and lackeys, but a gallant swordsman to boot in front. 'Tis surely from the rear such a one would attack!"

"Oh, well," said I indifferently, "afore or behind matters nothing. You will have no assault while Dick Ryder's sign-manual is on you, and that's his toasting-fork."

And so I fell behind, as she wished, and we proceeded. It was true enough, what she said, that the body of the coach would protect me from any eyes in front, and that I could make off more easily from the rear; but, Lord love you! I had no thoughts of that; and if I had been thinking of it, it might have occurred to me that, being in the van, I could see more plainly into what we were running than if I were in the rear. And, sure enough, that came near my undoing, for we had not gone two miles further, and were still some way out of the town bounds, when the coach suddenly pulled up before a tavern in a little village thereby, of which I cannot recall the name. We had passed several of these, and, as I have said, I cared not two straws for them, and so I was mildly exercised in my mind at this unexpected stoppage, and, coming to myself,

moved the mare slowly round t'other side of the coach to see what was forward.

“ If she is thirsty,” said I to myself, “ she shall drink, and, if it came to that, I was thirsty myself. And I was ready to hold up the innkeeper with a pistol-butt while we all drank a draught to our better acquaintance and miss’s eyes, maybe. But as I came round I was suddenly aware of a small crowd of people, some wearing uniforms, armed with halberds and lanthorns, and in the middle a short important gentleman with a paper in his hand. I had no sooner made this discovery than her ladyship shrieked out very loud,—

“ Seize that man ! He is a highwayman ! ”

At that, all alert, I pulled Calypso round and put my heels into her flanks ; but there was a bank of people before me in that quarter and the chaise to one side and the tavern t'other, and ere I could draw half a dozen hands were on the mare, and two of a posse that was in the throng had their pistols on the level.

There was I, taken, netted like any duck in a decoy, for certain, and with no prospect even of a struggle, for the numbers against me were great. I saw that in the twinkling of an eye, and so sat still, making no effort to escape.

“ What is this ? ” said I loudly. “ Hands off, sirrah ! Do you dare arrest an innocent man ? Who is in authority here, and what’s his foolish name ? ” said I.

At that the short man came forward, and I saw that he wore a long gown edged with some sort of fleece. “ Who are you ? ” I asked, assuming the most haughty, arrogant air, “ and under what pretence is a gentleman that is on the King’s business arrested and delayed ? ”

“ Sir,” he said, hesitating, “ I am Mayor of the town, and ’tis at her ladyship’s request—”

“ I know nothing of her ladyship,” said I, interrupting angrily. “ If her ladyship blunders, and you through her, you must take the consequence, Mr Mayor.”

He seemed put about at that, but my lady herself intervened, or I would have managed things for myself pretty easily.

“ I charge that man with stealing from me jewels and money to the amount of five hundred guineas, which you will find upon him,” said she, for she was now out of the coach and standing in the road among them all.

“ Yes, your ladyship,” says the Mayor anxiously, “ it shall be attended to.”

“ Well, someone shall smart for this,” said I, “ ere many days are out.”

“And my witness,” pursued her ladyship calmly, “sits in the coach, and is my late husband’s niece.”

“Oh, a witness,” says Mr Mayor, brightening up.

“To say nothing of my two fellows,” she ended.

With that I saw it was all up, for she was not one to lose her head, and with that plain issue before the Mayor, he could not blunder very far. So I said nothing more, but sat in the clutches of the officers cudgelling my wits for a way out.

“Celia,” says she, “is this the man that attacked us upon the road and stole my jewels?”

“I—I cannot discern very well—’tis dark,” stammered miss, and, rip me! I blessed the chit for that reluctance, though ’twas useless, as it happened, for says her ladyship,—

“Nonsense, baggage!” she says: “you can see quite plain. You are a coward, that’s what it is. Here, James and Joshua, what say you—is this the villain?”

Whereupon the lackeys both swore with one voice that it was I, and that I had attacked them brutally; and says one that I had put a bullet near his leg, whereas ’twas his own silly blunderbuss that he dropped.

“That is sufficient, my lady,” says the

Mayor, looking very pompous, and to that added what gave me the clue as to this unexpected trap. 'Twas nothing more or less than that little toad, the fat steward, who, for all his gabble and talk, had forgot to say that the Mayor of Maidstone was to come forth to meet her ladyship in state, in token of gratitude for favours to the townsfolk. 'Twas along of that fountain, as it seems, and I cursed the little fat fool in my heart in that, being so garrulous, he had put a limit to his tongue. But at the same time I could not but admire her ladyship's admirable skill and cunning. Sink me ! she was a wonder with her quickness, so to contrive to drag me into the trap. But these considerations availed me nothing, and I will confess that I saw no road of escape, though I am far from saying that I was beaten or that some notion would not ha' come to me later. Why, I have broke out of Newgate jug in the face of all. Yet this is what happened. In the thick of this talk and confusion, and even while the throng pressed upon me and my captors, suddenly a voice cried out from the coach.

“ There is the other, seize him !—there he goes, on the right there ! ” This was miss's voice, as I recognised, though I was amazed, and for the time did not pick up my wits. But in a second all was uproar.

"Who d'ye mean? What is it, you baggage?" cried out her ladyship.

"Seize him!—there he goes!" cries miss again, leaping from the coach in a state of excitement; and to her ladyship: "Why, the other, my lady!—the man that assisted—Creech, was it not?"

In an instant I saw how it was and what she intended, and I believe her ladyship, in her quickness, saw it just after me; for in the confusion the throng swayed, and some ran this way and others that, and there were my two jailers gaping into the darkness like moping owls.

'Twas but the work of a moment to wrench free an arm from one and deliver t'other a rap with a pistol on his skull; and at the same time I wheeled Calypso about and broke a third that stood there in the wind. The three thus scattered, with a whistle to the mare I dropped low in the saddle, and breaking out of the circle thundered down the road at a gallop, while all behind me arose cries and shouts, and above all her ladyship's shrill voice, screaming with fury.

I rode till I reached the first turning on the left, and then went up a black lane for some distance; after which I paused and listened. Sounds still came to me, sailing on the night, and I stood awhile, chuckling to think how

deeply her ladyship was cursing, and how smartly I had evaded her. And upon that comes the thought of miss.

"Why," thinks I, "she's a heart o' gold, is miss ; and that wild cat will be flying in her face with her claws ;" and, the devil being in me, as I have said, all through that business, I turned about and came back into the road.

I jogged along comfortably until I was within a hundred yards of the inn, and here was the same confusion that I had left.

"What's this ?" said I to a fellow that passed me.

"Oh," says he, "'tis a highwayman that has robbed a lady and is got off."

"Stab me !" says I, "what fools these traps be !" and I moved on, until I came by the coach, where I stood in the darkness.

I heard her ladyship's voice, coming out of the inn, and still angry, and there was several in the roadway, but the traps had vanished, and, I make no doubt, were looking for me busily. As I stood there thinking, someone comes from t'other side of the chaise, and I saw it was miss. At the same time she saw me and started.

"What do you here ?" she asked tremulously.

"Why," says I, "I am a-looking anxiously for a tobyman that has wickedly robbed a lady."

"Go," she cried, "you will be caught. They will be back directly."

"No," said I, "I am not the man to leave other people with my burdens."

"What do you mean?" said she after a pause.

"There is her ladyship," said I, "and there is yourself."

"Oh, I am well used to deal with her ladyship," she said, a little bitterly. "You need be in no alarm."

"Well, 'tis I shall deal with her ladyship this time," said I.

"You are mad!" she said. "Go—go—I hear them coming!"

"No," says I.

"Oh, go," she pleaded anxiously. "If you stay you will do me no good, and yourself all harm. I think you are bewitched to stay."

With that I looked at her, and though I could not see her very clearly in the small light, I vow she was mightily pretty. I suppose 'twas the devil in me moved me, or maybe 'twas only her beauty; but, at any-rate, said I,—

"If I may have now what I denied myself upon the road there, I will go," said I.

She drew herself straight and I could see her under-lip quiver.

"Sir," she said; "I know you to be a

highwayman ; at least, let me think you a gentleman."

" Damme ! " says I bluntly, for I was taken aback at this. " Damme ! no one shall say I am no gentleman, for I am that afore every-thing else, as I will prove on any buck's body." And so, with a big congee in my stirrups, I turned and left her.

THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE

THERE was many an adventure befell me in a pretty broad circuit of life that tickled my ribs to a proper tune ; and I have cackled over some escapades with a wider mouth than ever I sat out the most roaring comedy of the play-houses. Not but what there were some high-stepping pieces to my taste in the town—well enough to clap eyes on, no doubt, but cockatrices mighty greedy of the gullet, as you could spy at a glance. And, after all, a wench is no food for humour, but for another purpose altogether. I pin no faith upon 'em at the best. But of all the chances that I encountered, what most rarely served my palate was this unexpected meeting in the West Country, which, I will admit at the outset, and ere I saw clearly the shape of my predicament, set my heart a-bobbing fast enough. It fell in this way.

'Twas on a Monday in the late summer of that year of grace 1685 that I rode up from the valleys of the north in the company of Tony Flack, and we came to a pause upon the hind quarters of Exeter town. Tony himself

was for caution, and would have us turn away to a little roadside tavern that we both knew for a safe resting-place, with a staunch inn-keeper to boot. But I was for Exeter itself, for, to say the truth, my stomach was sour with those rank swipes of the country-side, and 'twas some days since I champed my teeth about a town. The facts argued with Tony, chicken-hearted as he was, and I will not deny it ; for there right before us lay the argument, in the shape of a rumbling, muddy, parti-coloured chaise that was creeping up the hill. Now it had so fallen out, more by way of a jest than by any material design, that we had scarified the occupant of this same carriage some ten miles back in the thick of a waste moorland that afternoon. 'Twas a mere idle freak, taken out of wantonness and upon a merry dinner, and by no means for the sake of the guinea or two that we found in his pockets. Tony gives the nag a slap of his sword, and off she goes a-spinning down the highway for dear life, with the coachman all a-sweat with terror, and the melancholy visage of a gentleman in his red periwig hanging out of the window ; while there we stood, the two of us, laughing a broadside. The nag had a piebald front to her, and the chaise, as I have said, was in several colours ; and thus it happened that, the lights falling suddenly

on 'em in that tail of the day, as we came out upon the back of Exeter, Tony drew up and shoved his paw forward with a mighty blank face.

" See there, Dick ! " says he. " And what d'ye make of that ? "

'Twas plain enough what I made of it, but I only laughed.

" I make a chaise and the half," says I, " and I'll warrant to make two by the time we reach Exeter," for, to be sure, swipes or no swipes, we had, each of us, a good warm lining to the stomach.

Tony cast me a surly glance. " Rot you ! " said he, " an' if the liquor spoil your wits, I'll be damned if it shall mine. Nor I won't run my neck into the noose for you nor any like you."

" You're a white-livered sort of cur, you are, Tony," said I, with another laugh. " And I suppose the traps will be waiting for us in a posse outside the White Hart. And I shouldn't wonder if the topsman himself was to snatch off his hat to us as we passed by."

" Sink me ! " growled Tony, " you forget 'twas broad daylight when we took 'em."

" Well," says I, " I have a notion to sleep in Exeter, and I mind me of a very dainty belly under my belt."

With that we brought up in a disputation,

and being in a merry mood, what with the wine and the sight of the windows twinkling in the town above me, I gave him a pretty salvo of wit, which sent him presently into a sullen temper.

"As you will," said he at last, "but I am no fool, and none knows better than you, Dick Ryder, that I am no coward. And I will be hanged for a common cutpurse if I go forth again upon any such mad business with a tipsy braggart."

"Braggart!" I cried, starting aflame, and twisting Calypso round against his horse's rump. But Tony saw in a flash that he had gone too far, and he turned very mild again.

"I mean no offence," said he; "we have been good comrades together, Dick Ryder. But I will warrant these daredevil humours will fetch us both up in Newgate ere long, and that's what I'm looking at," says he.

I laughed. "You would prove a better tobyman, Tony," said I, "if you would think less of your neck." And then, looking at him, I roared, "But, zounds, I don't wonder at your fears!" for his neck was like a cygnet's, only discoloured to a rusty iron.

But Tony was still in a sour enough mood, and though he jogged his horse to my summons, he spoke no word as we went up the hill. The chaise had vanished, but for all

that I could see his thoughts were twittering about it. And in this way we rode up into the town, sprinkled with growing lights, and 'twas not until we came abreast of the White Hart that Tony opened his mouth.

"If I was you, and was of your kidney," says he, with a sneer, "I should think shame to dine upon a sanded floor and drink out of ale-jugs. Nothing short of the White Hart would suit me ; no, not if I was to swing for it—if I was you, Dick Ryder."

"Damme," says I, suddenly, and reining in, "that same thought was in my own noddle! And, sure, the White Hart it shall be." With that I turned the mare's nose and was pointing for the door, when Tony stopped me.

"What the devil would you do ?" he cried in his alarm. "You will fetch the noose over us !"

"Faith," said I, "but you may go to the devil for me. I am weary of your clacking, and I have a mind to dine in good company."

He fell back with a curse, and Calypso moved on. But turning back, I saw him staring with a sulky sneer upon his face, and I could perceive from his attitude that he took my words for an empty piece of boasting. Then there was that term "braggart" stuck in my gullet ; and in a second, and upon the impulse, I pulled the mare's nose against the

doorway and bawled for the ostler. Tony was still visible, standing agape in the centre of the road ; but I paid him no heed, merely handing the bridle to the ostler, and then leaping from the saddle, I walked through the doorway as bold as you please. Now within the doorway there was a space of hall, very bare and plain, and upon two sides there opened doors into the further parts of the house ; but the third was filled with a screen of windows, separating a little privy corner, in which sat the innkeeper, very greasy and affable of look. I threw down a guinea and he fetched out a pint of wine ; the which drunken, I turned on my heel and clattered up to a great door set with brass knobs. But the little fat landlord was on my heels in a moment.

“ You cannot enter there,” says he, in a great taking. “ ’Tis a private room, and not for strangers.”

But with the wine newly bubbling in my head, I made little of him. “ The devil ! ” said I. “ I will have what I pay for, and I will enter where I list.”

“ But, indeed,” he gasped, “ ’tis a place privily set apart, and for an occasion.”

“ ’Tis good news,” I answered, with a cackle, “ for that is what my heart is set upon.”

He clasped my arm. "Sir ! sir !" he cried, "indeed this will be most vexatious to his lordship, and will lose me his custom."

I started round on him sharply. "If I want a door with brass knobs," says I, angrily, "I will have you know that I will have a door with brass knobs, ye little louse, ye !" And throwing off his hand, I opened the door.

Now 'tis certain enough that had I conserved my wits more properly, and that dismal juice was not so fluent in my blood, I would never have risked this piece of devilry. Not but what Dick Ryder wears a better face on him in the nick of peril than most, but this, as you will see, was scarce the occasion for a wanton adventure, and I will confess that Tony's counsels were wiser than my own. But I was heated with the drink and the long ride, and I would bear no gainsaying. And so back I flung the door. The same instant a cackle of laughter saluted my ears and a stream of light flashed in my eyes. What I made out was a long table, very elegantly prepared, and a dozen or more of gentle-folk seated at the board, and plying their knives like good trenchermen. There was a fire roaring on the hearth, and altogether the scene was very merry and presented a comfortable face. And what with that appearance of warmth and the smell of the viands

tickling my nostrils, I hesitated no longer upon the threshold where I stood, but pulling to the door, I strode across the room and shot my eyes about the table. Just then there came another flood of laughter, and in the noise of it I stood surveying the company, by this time in something of a confusion, and wondering in my fuddled wits what the devil I was at; when suddenly there gets up a gentleman from his seat near by, and very civilly offers me a chair. "Oh, well," thinks I, "as I am gone so far, I may as well flesh my nose in the victuals;" and with a word of grace in answer to his courtesy, down I propped upon my prats, and fell upon the viands with a will.

The room was buzzing with sound, and the warmth and the fare pleased me very well. But where the devil I was gotten, and who the devil these cullies might be, and why in God's name I was thus politely admitted to the board—these were the enigmas that floated about in my head. Not that I was in any embarrassment; for it was enough for me if I was to be entertained thus royally, waited upon with the best, and conjoined with a high company, such as was scattered about me—and all without so much as a single trespass upon the pocket. But by-and-by my civil neighbour turns to me.

“ You are late,” he says. “ I suppose you were held at the Court ; or do you ride from town ? ”

“ Well,” says I, very careful, for I am not the man to trip myself over a word, “ in a manner you may say yes,” I says ; and I took a draught of the tanker afore me.

“ Ah ! ” he said, and seemed to puzzle his wits over the rejoinder ; but I conceive he was in no very active condition of mind, and it is like enough that what I said seemed from some corners of aspect to contain a sensible answer. So he followed after my example, and sipped his wine meditatively.

“ His lordship,” says he, soon again, “ is in high feather this evening.”

“ You may say that,” said I, delivering a glance towards the head of the table, where sat a long-faced, handsome-looking fellow, whom, to say sooth, I had not as yet minded in the satisfaction of my appetite. “ He is filling a paunch, I warrant,” I said, with a laugh.

“ Hush ! ” whispered he, with a scared look on his face, and glancing about him, “ you will be overheard.”

“ Overheard ! ” I said. “ Am I a wench that must walk mim-mouthed through her wine, and not deal in the King’s plain English ? I permit no man to dictate me upon my language—not I.”

The fellow stared at me for a time, and then, " You have a bold tongue," said he, with what I could perceive was a hint of the ironic. " I have no doubt you ply it well. What is your court ? " says he.

Ay, there was the rub — what was my court ? And what the devil was I when you came to the kernel ? I had made out nothing as yet, being taken up with the food and the attentions of this gaping oaf. But I was not to be confounded by him, not if I knew my own temper ; and court or no court, I made answer bluff as you please. " The same as yours," says I.

" Oh ! " says he, breaking into a smile. " I wear my professions very discernible, then ? "

" Yes, you do," said I, bluntly.

" I am glad I have met you," he went on, pleasantly, " and I shall make it my duty to pursue our acquaintance. It is odd, indeed. And what think you, sir, of the Fassett business ? "

He spoke with the air of hanging on my words, and I was convinced that, whatever this d——d matter was, 'twas something of which I must needs be cognizant. So in I plunged.

" Ah, you may well ask," says I, nodding my head. " Gad ! and I see you are agreed with me. The circumstances stand so plain

that there is no denial. By God ! you are right ; I'll warrant that ; and I myself am game to prove it with the point," says I, slapping my sword.

The gentleman drew away, looking at me with some amazement, and presently his face took on an expression of confusion, and says he,—

" Quite so ! " says he. " Oh, yes, I am of your party ; " and in truth I believe the fool took what I said for a reply to his interroga-
tion. But by this I was now sobered enough to discover the responsibilities among which I was thrown, and that I must keep a strong observation open if I was not to run my head into danger. And the first, I must enlighten myself upon this company in which I found myself ; for which purpose, leaning forward, I set my eyes upon the man at the end of the table and examined him diligently. He was, I judged, somewhere about thirty-five, of a fine oval face, very justly proportioned, a sallow brown in habit, and crowned above his rich brown eyes with a great brown wig, which sat awry upon his head, and added an effeminate look to the profligate softness of his lower face. His features were very finely marked, his nose long and straight and delicately fleshed, as were his curved and smiling lips ; and his eyes, which were large within

the sockets, gleamed like agates between the narrow curtains of his eyelids, and sprang very quickly into one simulation or another. Altogether his was a remarkable face to look on, and attracted strongly, for all the saturnine changes of his colour. He was laughing, flushed to the sombre eyes. I had finished my scrutiny, and I took off my gaze from him, and was for letting it fall back on my neighbour to interrogate him upon the identity of this fine cock, when in its passage along the opposite side of the table I discovered, not very far from his lordship himself, no other than the prim-faced gentleman of the parti-coloured chaise that Tony and I had ransacked that same afternoon upon the moors.

The discovery struck me with dismay, as you will imagine ; but there was worse to tread upon its heels, for the man was bowing with a delicate and sickly smile to one that toasted him from t'other side, and in putting down his glass, and with the grin still upon his lips, his eyes lighted upon mine and we exchanged glances.

The cully turned a trifle pale, and winced, moving in his seat. Then he frowned, and seemed mightily taken up with his plate, after which he lifted his head again and directed a look on me. I met him very bold and square, and his eyes gave way before me,

surrendering, so to say, to my discharge ; for I warrant I gave him a heavy broadside. But all the time I kept seeking in my brain for some way out of this damnable predicament. Presently he catches up a piece of paper, and ripping out a quill, makes some writing, and calling to a lackey, hands him the document. “ What’s he up to now ? ” thinks I. But I was soon to learn, for the footboy walked up to the head of the table, and with a bow offered the paper to his lordship—*whoever the devil he* might be.

“ Well,” says I to myself, “ I am committed to it now ; and it’s my bearing against his, and the best credentials.” And with that, feeling that the matter was passed out of my hands, I turned on my neighbour, and says I to him, but still keeping an eye on the pale-faced booby, “ Who may his lordship be ? ” I says.

Now ’twas folly in me to have put the query so direct, and indeed I would not have ventured on the simplicity had not my wits been disturbed by the incident I have related. But, in point of fact, it mattered very little to the issue of the misadventure, though my friend started very suddenly, and gazed at me in a gaping fashion.

“ You are jesting,” he says. “ His lordship?”

“ Well,” says I, a trifle grimly, for I saw

the same lordship casting his eyes upon the paper. "And maybe you can put a name on him, if I can't."

"But—but," he stammered, and then "who may you be?" he asked, with some suspicion, and in another manner.

"Damn you!" said I, "I've put you a question, and a gentleman should need no reminder of his necessary civilities," for by this I saw his lordship's soft and shining eyes directed on us. "What's the cully's name?" I asked.

He looked up, following my glance, and we both stared at the man who was staring at us.

"'Tis my Lord Jeffreys," he says, in a bare whisper. You will believe me, and I make no shame to admit it, that my legs took a tremor at the words; but I can keep a face upon me with any, and so I stared at that sinister and smiling butcher, and he stared at me, for the space of some seconds; and then I took a draught of wine.

"Thank'ee," says I, calmly, to my neighbour. "'Tis well. I have some business with his lordship."

I spoke very calmly, as I say, but you will believe me my heart was sunk into my boots on this news. There was no man at that time but held the name of Bloody Jeffreys in a horror. He lumped so large in the popular

fear that he was taken for an emblem and ensign of Satan himself, so diabolic and so ensanguined was his practice. I have seen many formidable persons in my time, and exchanged passadoes with several of them, but there it was—the fact and figure of that murdering, black-hearted, handsome rake, almost of an age with myself, seated there in his chair, crept over me like the pest, and discharged my wits abroad like a spray of sand scattered afore the wind. I cast my eye again on him, for, indeed, I could not keep it away, and a faint sardonic grin touched his face as he met my glance. He summoned to him a lackey and spoke in his ear with an imperious gesture, whereat the fellow, seeming very much frightened, hurried out of the room, and I doubted not that he was gone for the officers. His lordship then turns to the gentleman near him and, still with his stealthy and terrible smile, whispers under his breath. The whole company, meanwhile, which had all along hung upon his looks and conversation like a pack of craven dogs on their master, was fallen into sudden silence ; but this communication was spread from mouth to mouth like a running fire, and in a moment the whole room was agape and directing on me surprised and startled glances. But this pulled me together, and 'twas high time too.

“ Well,” thinks I, “ an’ I must lay my back against a wall, I must ; but they shall learn that Dick Ryder is not to be browbeat by a lot of scurvy lawyers ” (for so I supposed ’em), “ whatever fate be in store for him.”

And so, turning to my next-door neighbour, I began very loudly, and as if resuming a conversation with him,—

“ Nay, nay ; but I am at odds with you, sir. Faith, I disagree with you entirely ! Upon my soul, I have never seen his lordship in a better condition and better plumed for service ! A worm in his head, say you ? Godsakes, I’ll never believe it ! His wits wear to a knife edge with practice.”

Now this was spoke, as I have said, in a clamant voice, which, resounding on the unnatural silence that had fallen on the room, reaches me the ears of all this company, as I had desired, and more particularly those of his lordship, for whom I had designed the speech. Jeffreys turned of a sudden a darker red under his brown, and his woman’s eyes shot anger.

“ And who is this that dares pass questions on his lordship ? ” he cries, in a sharp, clear tone. “ Come, I should like to look on him attentively,” he says, “ that I might know him again. He must be a fellow worth ac-

quaintance if for his future only. I promise you that shall be secured to him, and that he shall know very soon."

But at this ugly exhibition of temper, and more especially at the malicious menace it conveyed, my poor neighbour fell into a fluster, and ran white and red in turns, opening his mouth, and trembling and stuttering, and gasping like a dying fish. "My lord, I—I said nothing. 'Tis false," he stammered.

The poor wretch was in so pitiable a way that I found it in my heart to be sorry for him ; and, after all, he had served me very kindly at the start, so I spoke up, rising in my seat and bowing.

"My lord," I said, "the gentleman says well. Though 'twas to him that my remarks in praise of yourself were addressed, I was mistook. 'Twas not on you that his comment was directed."

"That is a very likely tale," said his lordship, with a frown ; and then appearing to recover himself, as he was used to do, quite rapidly, he stared at me with another expression.

"I am in your debt, sir," he said, "for your defence of me. You do well. I warrant Jeffreys has still his wits about him. He has an eye for a rogue, sir. You will do him the justice to acknowledge that, I hope, on our

better acquaintance." And he laughed somewhat harshly, and eyed the board as if inviting a round of acclamation. The miserable time-servers cackled their loudest, and his lordship, turning again to me, "I should know your face," says he, and offers a kind of wink to the company.

"'Tis no wonder, my lord," I answered, pat as you will; "'tis almost as well known as your lordship's, and almost as favourably received."

At that a young fellow across the table from me broke into a stutter of laughter. But all the rest were silent. Jeffreys looked at him savagely. "I will remember you, Charteris," he said simply, and I saw the light flaming in the eyes he directed on me. "That's well," he said, "and I make no doubt that you are, like myself, a dispenser of justice. You hold the scales."

"Indeed, my lord," said I, for I was not in a mood to be thus baited whilst waiting on the officers, "there is more resemblance between you and me, perchance, than your lordship will acknowledge."

"Ha!" he cried, with his cold and bitter laugh. "I knew not that I was unawares entertaining a rival. A learned man in the law is this gentleman, no doubt. Well, sir, I will be greedy of your advice while I may.

Look you. There was a man tried afore me this day that had rumpadded a civil and innocent gentleman upon the King's highway, and faith the rascal was rash enough to venture into the company of his victim to dinner. What d'ye say to that ? What sort of sentence would ye deliver on the wretch ? ”

“ How was he took ? ” said I.

“ Well,” says his lordship, after a pause, and smiling towards the door, “ I fancy the sheriff's officers were summoned upon him.”

“ Nay,” said I. “ Then, had I been justice, since he was took, I would ha' hanged him, for 'twas a poor wit that served him no surer than to be so took.”

“ Fie ! ” says Jeffreys. “ What interpreter of the law is here ! ”

“ 'Twould not be the first time that the law was twisted by its dispenser, my lord,” said I, boldly.

His lordship's smile stole farther up his face, and opened his lips so that the white teeth shone, and he smiled in an ugly fashion to the fellow next him.

“ You hear that, my lord ? ” says he, in his sneering way. “ Faith, they will presently be saying that we did not deal justice to Dame Alice Lisle.”

The man that he addressed winced and smiled uneasily, for 'twas well known that

the popular feeling ran high upon the scandalous trial, which was but newly concluded, though I wondered to hear the prime engine of that infamous conviction jest so wantonly upon it. But that was Jeffreys's way, to offer a bold face and play the bully when he was in power ; but when he was down, there was no coward to whine like him, as events proved subsequently. But Jeffreys turns to me again, content enough with his sally.

“ Sirrah,” he said, “ you have a signal charter for your tongue, I can perceive. It is a righteous conscience keeps you in countenance. You are bold upon your virtues. I have met your kidney before, and if I must hang a knave, I prefer to hang one with an insolent front to him that snivels. I would disembowel t'other in the pillory. There is too much softness in this modern justice.”

“ My lord,” says I, “ you speak my feelings like a book. Faith, I would griddle the canting rogue with these two hands.”

His lordship smiled very diabolic, and then finished his wine with the air of one that has tired of the play, at the same time nodding to the lackey that stood near by him exceedingly respectful. But he went out of the room.

“ Gad ! ” says the young man that was called Charteris, in a whisper to his neighbour, “ 'tis a pity to go farther. Faith, I think he

hath earned his pardon for the steady face he keeps."

But you must suppose that all this time I was not idle in my mind, but kept casting my wits about the predicament, with a mighty sharp eye upon any chances that emerged. Well, the case was turning very black by now, seeing I knew well enough for what the signal of his lordship was intended, and I had as yet gotten no very clear notion in my head. Yet at the next opening of the door, and when the first noise of heavy feet sounded on the threshold, my thoughts spouted forth in a clear stream, and there sat I as taut and cool as you please, for all the world as though 'twas a private party to which Jeffreys had invited me for a guest. His lordship rose as the officers entered, and was turning away indifferently without ever a sign or a word, when he suddenly stopped again.

" 'Twould be strange to learn, sirrah," said he, addressing me, " out of a natural curiosity, what robbed thee of thy senses to fetch thee here. 'Tis an odd new policy for the hare to lie down with the fox."

With that I got to my feet. "Mylord," said I, very boldly and in a public voice, " I have come here uninvited, 'tis true, and I proffer you my apologies for the trespass; but I have come upon a pressing private business with your lordship."

His lordship stared at me with a sour look in his eye. "Indeed?" says he, harshly. "I am not used to have any business but the one with your kidney, and that not private," he says.

"My lord," said I, "'tis the most urgent message, and needeth instant delivery."

I saw in his eye that he still meditated to refuse me, but I set my gaze upon him very intently, and what he thought he saw there made him waver.

"Well," said he, in his tyrannical fashion, "I hope we shall hear good of this message; for I swear, if I do not, I will have thee hanged the higher," and he motioned to me to draw nearer, at the same time that the other gentlemen of the King's counsel withdrew to the bottom of the room, conversing together. But the officers approached, and stood a little way off by Jeffreys's signal, but keeping out of earshot.

"Who are you, fellow, and what pretences are these you make?" asked his lordship, roughly, as soon as we were alone, but examining me with curiosity.

"My lord," said I, "I make no pretences, as I shall assure you; and as for myself, believe me that I play a truer part than does appear."

I looked at him meaningly.

"Let us come to plain speech," said he, sharply. "I cannot dawdle with your riddles."

"I ask no better, my lord," I cried. "I bear a message from the Prince."

He started, and stared at me under his brows in suspicion. "What Prince?" he asked brusquely.

"There is but one," said I, boldly, "and one that shall rest so no longer by God's grace and the trusty arms of England."

"You mean the Prince of Orange?" he asked, in a lower voice. I nodded. For a while he looked me in the eyes, and then, turning to the sheriff's officers, ordered them to withdraw a little; after which he came back to me, surveying me with his cold and savage eyes, but with something of anxiety.

"You are a bold man," he said, "to bring me this message."

"I would do that and more than that for the good cause," said I.

Jeffreys was silent, and then, "Come, what is this message, then?" he inquired, with a sardonic glance.

For the life of me I could not have determined if he were taken with the bait, but I swore to hook him, as, indeed, it was the only course left to me.

"Your lordship has not heard the news

from the coast ? ” says I, looking round very cautiously.

“ Proceed,” he commanded, watching me with his beautiful and horrid eyes.

“ Events have been stirring in the Low Country,” said I, “ as your lordship will be aware. The whole of the North is disaffected against his Majesty. It needs but to land,” I said, “ and your lordship knows what might happen.”

“ I think, sir, we were to come to quarters,” said Jeffreys, in a low voice, but still ~~in~~ in his imperious way.

Well, if he would take it, he was to have it then and there. “ The Prince,” says I, whispering, “ is already landed.”

He started before my eyes, but recovering himself, “ I have had runners from Plymouth this afternoon,” he said, “ and there was no news of import.”

“ Nay,” said I, “ 'tis not from Plymouth I come, my lord.”

“ If I were to ask you whence—” he began, after a pause.

“ You would remember, my lord, ere you did so, that I have not yet delivered my message, and thus have had no reply,” I said.

“ You remind me of my duty,” he exclaimed sternly. “ Deliver this message, for I can tarry no longer.”

" My lord," said I, " I would have come to it sooner were it not for your distrust. I am charged by the Prince himself, no less. I have ridden all day upon a circuit. Three noblemen were named, and your lordship also. The Prince lies on English soil to-night, and would confer with these four faithful subjects."

Jeffreys stood awhile in thought, his delicate face changing with a dozen emotions. Then he spoke very harshly.

" This is very well, sirrah. You make an excellent liar," he said. " You would come here and offer me a cock-and-bull tale, thinking me a lack-wit to see you so impudently stand in your lie."

" My lord," said I, as warm as may be, " see in what my position stands. I am come here, penetrating to your very fireside. I stake my head upon the risk. 'Tis in your office to sound a word, and these fellows will take me forth upon a capital charge of treason. I have cast my die for the good cause. Yet my death, which would be an evil to me in that case, would profit you nothing, my lord—nay, less than nothing in the coming trouble."

Again he paused. " The Chief Justice of this realm does not parley with treason," said he.

But I had a glimpse of the man now ; I saw what fear ran in his blood ; he would not

have kept me haggling there if he had it not in his heart to coquet with fortune.

“ My lord,” I said, “ and who would credit that a poor highwayman talked of state politics with the Lord Chief Justice ? Why, a gallows and the topsman would serve his turn.”

He heaved a little sigh, fidgeting with his fingers. “ Who the devil are you ? ” he asked. “ You are taken for a padsman.”

“ My lord,” said I, “ 'tis strange company a man may keep for a purpose. I will not deny that I know your suspicions, and whence they spring. Indeed, it was the gentleman's natural conclusion. I was pressed to carry my mission. Sure I have been worse accompanied than by a tobyman. But as for my name, your lordship has given me no answer. Call me Ryder. I am for the Prince.”

He heard me out, and 'twas the little touch of braggadocio I think that converted him, as much as anything. “ What do you propose ? ” he asked, in another tone.

“ I would ride back to-night,” I said, “ unless your lordship decide that I must lodge in jail.”

“ As to that,” he exclaimed, “ Mr Ryder, I fear that we must lodge you there in the meantime. What hour would you start ? ”

"The sooner the better," said I. "But nine will serve."

He regarded me with an urgent face of inquiry. "This may be a trap," he said suspiciously.

"Your lordship may guard against that," said I, suavely. "As large an escort of horse as you will, and none to know our destination save us two."

"Nay, none save yourself, Mr Ryder, it appears," he said grimly. "But you say well. I will be with you at nine."

Thereupon he motioned me away with a gesture of impatience and calling on the sheriff, pointed at me. The next moment I was surrounded and in their arms; but I played my part like a play-actor, crying upon his lordship to hear me, and making a piteous struggle with the officers.

A little later, and you might see me settled in the compter, hugging myself the one minute, and the next perplexed upon a further step; for, by what I saw of Jeffreys, I reckoned upon my punctual deliverance. The fact is that he was afeared of what would issue from this promised trouble of the Dutchman, and 'twas reported that such was the state of most of those about the Court, who were in the mind to play two parts, and neither with any stomach. Yet as the time

drew on and I had ample leisure to digest the various aspects of the adventure, I confess I was assailed by a fear lest Jeffreys should have been disporting himself with me, or should have cocked the white feather, and that I was still to rest and rot in that pestiferous dungeon. So that when at last the door swung wide and one of the turnkeys appeared, I was like to have cried out in my glee. 'Twas the signal, sure enough, for I was taken forthright out of my cell, and commanded into the presence of the governor. I do not know by what trickery the affair was managed, but if there was ever any dark intrigue to the point, you might trust Bloody Jeffreys for that ; all I know is that 'twas but a few minutes ere I was out of the gates of the compter, under the pale face of the moon, and with my heels in the flanks of Calypso, gently ambling in a silent company towards the Plymouth road.

His lordship had taken me at my word, and there were six or more in the band that surrounded me ; but we rode in a deep quiet, and for a long while I offered no address to the horseman by me, whom I supposed to be the Chief Justice himself. But presently, and when our faces were well set upon the Plymouth highway, and there was less chance that the cavalcade would invite curiosity owing to the sparseness of the wayfarers, he

turned to me and spoke up for himself. It was Jeffreys, sure enough, and he wore a mighty look of worry, as I could perceive at the first glance.

" You have not informed me, Mr Ryder," says he, " to what destination we are bound ? "

Now this was pretty much to the point, for Bloody Jeffreys was not the man to waste useless words ; but, Lord love you, I had as much notion of whither we were set for as he had himself. 'Twas for a chance I was playing, and now that I had my two legs across Calypso once more, it would go badly with the whole half-dozen of 'em if I did not show a clean pair of heels somewhere and sometime. But of course I had thought upon the question in my prison, and says I, " You will understand, your lordship, that it's not in my authority to commit anything to words. I am bound by the Prince's orders."

" That is very well," he retorted, in his arrogant way. " But it appears that I must commit myself, and no one else. 'Tis a one-sided bargain I am not used to make."

" My lord," said I, very earnestly, " I will not deny but there is reason in your argument —and, for myself, I would at once admit you to my plans. But I am the custodian of the Prince's secret. 'Tis none of my own I guard."

"Well, well," he cried, with impatience, "I suppose that I am to arrive somewhere."

"And where that somewhere is your lordship shall learn," said I, "with the permission and from the lips of his gracious Majesty King William."

He started at the words, and eyed me askance for a space, a dubious expression of irresolution crossing his features. "You are a bold man, Mr Ryder," he exclaimed, with something of a sneer. "I may remind you that there surround you five stalwart men-at-arms that own allegiance to his Majesty James II."

"And you would have added, my lord," said I, "that James Stuart's trusted servant is conversing with me. I am sensible of the peril in which I stand. But I am no Facing-Both-Ways. I hold by my conscience, i' faith."

"Sir," he rapped out, harsh and sudden, "I have laid you by the heels within the precincts of the compter once, and there I will lay you again, if you brandish your impudence before me."

"In the which case, my lord," quoth I, coldly, "you will be nothing bettered, and King William would have a loyal servant to avenge."

He said nothing, angrily considering me.

“Come, come, my lord,” I said, “we are in a kind of silly balance one against t’other, and, to put no veil upon the situation, we scarce dare trust each other. I walk in a great public peril, sure, with your hands upon me, but consider upon what risks you yourself also move. I am familiar to the Prince ; my errand is known about his Court. Turn about your horse, fetch me in chains to justice, and how will you appear ? ’Tis a summary way with a royal herald. I ask you with what eyes the King will view this act, and with what penalties he will reward it ? ”

Jeffreys said nothing for a time, and then, speaking slowly, “You have,” he said, in a quieter voice, “a strong persuasion of the Prince’s triumph.”

“My lord,” said I, “you yourself shall be the judge. What cries are these that issue from the town these many months ? With what voices was the Duke of Monmouth welcomed but yesterday ? Nay, the people of this very country-side, newly trodden and trampled by King James’s dragoons, scarred and lacerated by your own ensanguined hands, my lord—with what a face do they regard James Stuart, and what a welcome think you they would give ye for yourself ? ”

His lordship whitened under the moonlight, and his face betrayed an emotion of terror.

'Twas plain that he had entertained these same thoughts, and that my design had given him several unhappy hours. But he made me no answer, and rode on, digesting these considerations with what stomach he might.

Now all this time we were getting farther into the rude country parts of the shire, and more than once I had turned the party upon a by-way, so that by this we were come out by the devil knows where. Moreover, it was become very late, and a shrewd wind from the south came snapping about our faces. And thus it grew upon me that I must bring this topsy-turvy adventure to some close, with what wit I might ; the more particularly as by his lordship's contrivance (I make no doubt) I rode in the midst of a circle, and was evidently to consider myself a fast prisoner in the meantime. Now I had bred in my mind a very tolerable design by which I might have given 'em the slip, but by this time I was too nearly watched for that, and the bare appearance of the little inn of Wolcombe, which I was contemplating, would have served to start suspicions, if not certainty, in Jeffreys's noddle. So thinks I to myself that 'tis ever a bold course that runs the least risk, as, indeed, I have always attributed my own security to my never shirking a hazard in the passage of fortune. Upon which suggestion

comes another—that the present would serve as well as another opportunity, and better too, seeing that his lordship's eyes were beginning to lower on me at this undue delay. Wherefore what do I at this juncture, and when jogging along the way in the full face of old Oliver, but rein the nag to one side, and reaching down, open a huge gate that stood a little aback from the road.

“What is this?” asked Jeffreys, in surprise.

“This is the place, my lord,” said I, in a whisper. “If you will march with me a little in the fore of these men, I will instruct you further as we ride up.”

There was a moment's pause on his part, but then I suppose he considered the probabilities, and he saw that the road was clearly an approach to some great house. At anyrate, he issued an order to his escort, and the party wheeled up after me through the gateway and up the avenue.

“I take it, sir,” he said at once, “that the Prince lies here?”

“That is so, my lord,” said I, though, to say sooth, I was all the time wondering what the devil might lie at the end of this long passage, and what should be my next turn in the game. But Jeffreys seemed quite satisfied, and he even displayed a ruffle of eagerness

at this juncture ; and so once more in deep silence we rode on, and came out soon upon a great terrace of gravel surrounded by an amphitheatre of trees, with the long house lying black and high upon one side. The whole troop came to a halt here, and his lordship turned to me as who should ask, “ What must be done now ? ” It was manifest on the instant that my only course lay in some prompt act, seeing that there was no opportunity to show my heels ; and so, beckoning him with a quiet motion, I jogged on towards the house, Calypso’s heels making a devilish noise trampling on the stones. Somewhere within the house shone a faint light, though ’twas long past midnight, and it seemed, therefore, that someone was astir within. His lordship’s eyes met mine anxiously, and he moistened his lips. He was greatly agitated, for certain, and the sight strung my nerves. Off I leaped, and rapped loudly upon the knocker before the big door. Now I swear to you that when I laid my fingers to the knocker I had never a thought in my head as to the course I should pursue. But on that instant, and while the echoes rang still in my ears, I took a quick notion. Leaning forward to Jeffreys, I said, whispering,—

“ My lord, I will prepare your way. Keep ye here, and you shall be fetched presently.”

He stared at me suspiciously and in some bewilderment ; but ere he could say anything the door swung gently back. With a spring I was across the threshold—and click goes the lock behind me in the very face of the astonished janitor. But he fell a-trembling.

“ Who are you ? ” he said, while the light he carried shook in his hands.

“ Hush ! ” says I, warningly ; “ make no noise. Your lives hang on it. There is a pack of dirty cut-throats on my heels,” I says.

“ Oh, Lord ! ” he groaned, and retired hurriedly from the door. I followed him, but he drew back, very suspicious.

“ My good man,” said I, judging him by his looks to be the butler, “ pray use me with no suspicion. I am come to warn you. See, I bear no arms, but am a private and peaceful citizen like yourself.”

“ How come you here ? ” he asked, being somewhat reassured.

“ I became privy to their designs by accident at the Wolcombe Inn, the scurvy rogues,” said I, very pat and indignant, “ and I have rode on to warn your master in the nick of time. Where may he be ? ”

“ His lordship is abed, sir,” he says.

“ Oh, well,” said I, “ hale him forth.”

“ Nay, but I dare not,” says he.

"Oh, very well," said I. "Then you shall have your throats cut, every man."

His jaw fell ; then, "I have a blunderbuss," says he, brightening of a sudden.

"Blunderbuss!" says I, with a sneer. "Why, 'tis a veritable band of roaring satans, that lives on blunderbusses."

"Oh, Lord deliver us!" he cried, and wrung his hands. "What shall we do?"

Now, in point of fact, as you may see, 'twas in my power without more ado to play on my poor butler's fears, and so, skipping out of a back door, to leave Jeffreys and his crew to cool their heels on the terrace. But I was by this time infused with a certain zest of the adventure ; I entertained it with a gusto ; and so, drawing him gravely to a window near by that looked upon the front.

"See you," said I, pointing out the escort where they lay in waiting, "there's a monstrous set of rascals for ye, all a-hungering for blood, they are, all a-spitting on their hands to flirt their hangers, with which to slit the throats of poor civil citizens like me and you."

"Lord save us!" he said, with his teeth going. And just at that moment a thin voice sounded from somewhere above, and a tall lean old gentleman, wrapped in a night-rail and looking choleric of face, peered over the stairway at us.

“ What the devil are you at, Jenkins ? ” he says peevishly.

“ Oh, my lord,” cried Jenkins (if that was the fool’s name), “ ‘tis a gentleman that has come to warn us—and there is a pack of highwaymen without, and our throats shall all be cut ! Heaven help us ! ”

“ Silence, sirrah ! I will have none of this noise,” cries the old gentleman, in a peppery voice. “ You have disturbed my rest ! ” he says angrily.

“ But, my lord,” cried poor Jenkins, “ the highwaymen—”

“ Well, well,” says he, shrilly, “ send ‘em away. You must get rid of ‘em,” and he looked testily at the butler.

But by this time with the noise of our talking the whole house was awake, and there came the sound of doors opening, and forth from dark passages broke lights, and faces peeped over balustrades.

“ My lord,” said I, for ‘twas time for me to think of old Jeffreys outside, “ ‘tis true there’s highwaymen without, but I can think of a way to trap ‘em.”

“ ‘Tis well someone has his wits,” says he, pettishly. “ Well, what would you do ? ”

“ I would let the captain in,” said I, “ when he knocks on the door, and shutting him off from his fellows, fall upon him and take him.”

“ What then ? ” said he.

“ Why,” says I, “ you may then make your terms with the gang, having him for a hostage.”

“ Why did you not think of that, Jenkins ? ” said the old gentleman, querulously. “ Jenkins, you shall capture the captain as this gentleman advises.”

But Jenkins’s face fell, and he fidgeted with his fingers : ’twas plain the mission was not to his taste. There was no time to spend upon such tremors, for indeed I knew that Jeffreys would be getting suspicious in his mind, and I was now resolute to put a score upon him for his ugly behaviour. So said I : “ There is no need, my lord, to entrust the matter to Jenkins here, seeing that all may bear a hand. I make no doubt that there be weapons of a kind, and if Mr Jenkins, maybe, will jump on the villain’s back when he is down—”

“ Faith, that will I,” said Jenkins, stoutly, and armed himself forthwith with a warming-pan that hung upon the walls.

And that act setting the note, the company broke away in a commotion, each securing some form of a missile wherewith to assail the miscreant. And with that, as if the affair was already at an end, the old gentleman pulls his wrapper close around him and returns very coolly to his bed. But I had no time for

these observations, for now was come the occasion upon which my scheme depended, and,—

“ There he knocks,” said I, suddenly.

But they were all so cluttered with their fears and their excitement that not one of them but believed I spoke the truth.

“ Lord, how savage he knocks ! ” says a wench, with a shiver, and lays hold of a lackey’s arm.

I went down to the door, and upon the first lifting of the latch they popped away like rabbits in a warren. There, sure enough, was his lordship, in a mighty trepidation and with an ugly scowl.

“ Come in,” says I, in a whisper ; “ the Prince was abed, but will see you at once, my lord.”

He came over the threshold, and—clap—I shut the door behind him ; and when that was done I breathed more freely, for I knew that I was secure in my game. The Chief Justice, looking very fine and stately, advanced down the solitary hall, emerging under the dim light ; and then, all of a sudden a hassock came rustling through the air and took him in the belly. Over he went with a little gasp, and measured his length upon the floor. Upon that leaps out my friend Jenkins with his warming-pan, and bestriding his

lordship's back, sets to belabouring for dear life. Immediately after, and encouraged by this, others of the lackeys sprang forth and fell to maltreating the poor cully where he lay.

"Take that, you lousy knave, you?" says one fat wench, and turns over him a kitchen utensil of some kind.

"Let me scratch his eyes!" cries another; and Lord love you, what with their exclamations and the screaming, to say nothing of the noise of Jenkins's warming-pan and his lordship's angry oaths, you would have thought that Bedlam was broke loose.

But in the midst of it all I caught suddenly a sound of horses' hoofs upon the gravel, and on the top of that came a hammering at the door. I am no fool to outstay my welcome and so thinks I that the time is come, and seizing a light that stood near by I made straight through the midst of that uproar and plunged into the nether darkness of the house. Here, by picking my way through divers passages, I presently came forth by a side door and passed out into the night. A shrill whistle in the old way fetched Calypso to me whinnying, and as I put my hand upon her bridle I turned back and listened. There was that pandemonium still within the hall, reaching me faintly through the open doorway, and the escort was still hammering on

the hall door. Then I leaped into the saddle and turned the mare's nose down a side track in the park, and the last I heard as I rode off, chuckling to myself, was the noise of the escort pounding on the door.

THE ATTACK ON THE CHAISE

I HAVE had ever an eye for a doxy, and in the course of my life have happened upon a variety of the sex such as falls to few men. Some have been fine ladies, brave with their lace and powder, and others again have descended upon a scale to the common Kixsy-winsky ; but in the end I would wager Polly Scarlet against any of the pack. Yet I will confess that there were some that have mightily tickled me, and one or two that went near to turn my head for their looks alone, to speak nothing of their state and grace. Not but what I have long learned the measure of beauty, and how far it may go—a man is a fool to surrender to that on the summons ; yet I will not deny how greatly it disturbs the midriff, and, coming home so sharp, does thus affect the bearing of us all. Madam or miss, there was no handsomer lady in town on that summer night when I encountered her than Sir Philip Caswell's ward, and 'twas that, I'll be bound, influenced me in my behaviour subsequently. Nevertheless, I vow I did not care two straws for the pretty puss in my heart.

'Twas after a long evening at a gaming house in Marylebone that I was returning on my two legs through the fields for Soho. I was in a pleasant temper, having filled my pockets with king's pictures, and I had drunk nothing save a bottle or so of good burgundy since dinner. The hour, indeed, was past midnight, and I was casting up the chances to find supper at the Pack Horse, or the Golden Eagle, or some other house known to me. "Well," says I, as I came out in the hedgerows, "'tis nearly one, and rip me if I do not sup and lie abed by two, and live virtuous," for I was pleased with what I was carrying, and loth to lose it. A bird was calling in a flutter from the hedge, and just upon that another sound came to my ears, and on the still air arose the clamour of swords in engagement. This was nothing to me, for I am not used to intermeddle in such affairs as nocturnal brawls, unless, indeed, I am gone in liquor, as sometimes happens, or am led off by troublesome company. But to the sounds of the fight succeeded the voice of a woman, crying, but not very loudly, for help. This, as you may believe, was upon another footing, for there was never a petticoat that appealed to Dick Ryder in her trouble in vain, as my records will prove on any road in England. So off I set at a run in the direction

of the sounds, which seemed to stream out of the entrance to Windmill Street. The houses here were black and silent (it being so late) and there was no sign of any interest on the part of the inhabitants of the quarter. But the moon, which had been under a scurry of clouds, struck out of her shelter and showed me plain the scene of the struggle. There, in the roadway, stood the body of a chaise, with two trampling horses, while about it was a melley of figures, two of which were engaged, hammer and tongs, upon each other. I was not long ere I had seized the situation, and interpreted it properly ; and, whipping out my blade, I made no ado about falling on the assailants of the chaise. 'Twas easy to make out who these were, inasmuch as one of the men wore a mask across his eyes. I ran upon him and those behind him, while I was aware of the woman's cry that still issued out of the chaise but now suddenly stopped.

At that I lunged, but on that same instant the scum about him came at me from the side, so that I was forced to keep my eyes and weapon in two places. The man in the mask had not ceased to ply his point on the gentleman whom I took to be the owner of the chaise, and this seemed a sturdy, obstinate fellow enough, for he puffed and grunted hard at my ear, but fought like any dragon. One

of those that came at me I winged in the arm, and, swiftly dodging behind my ally, I came upon the masked man and ran him through the shoulder without advertisement. He dropped his arm with an oath, and, as he did so, the mask fell from his face, which showed clear and lean in the moonlight. But that was no sooner done than the big man by me lurched and staggered, so that it was plain he had taken something in his vitals. Well, here was I now all alone with that evil pack about me, pressing on me like birds of prey, for although I had pinked one and his master, there was two more able-bodied culleys left, to say nothing of the master himself, whose wound, to judge from his language, was more painful than serious. I am quick at a resolve, and know when to withdraw from in front of odds. There was a man fallen wounded, and maybe dead, and no signs of the watch ; while from the chaise peered, as I caught a glimpse, a white and terrified face in the moonlight. The coachman, it was clear, had taken to his heels already, and the horses stood champing and trembling and swaying in their alarm at the noises. What does I, then, as there was a little lull in the fray and the others temporarily drew off, but stoop and lift the big man from the ground and bundle him rapidly into the chaise. Bang

goes the door and, leaping to the coachman's seat, I lashed the horses with the flat of my blade. They started in a panic, and the chaise went plunging and rocking down the narrow way.

This fetched me into King Street, and, in fear of pursuit, I stood up and banged at the nags, so that I had them bumping at a gallop round into the Oxford Road and on the way for Tyburn. When we had run some distance I brought 'em to with an effort, and, hearing no noise of the enemy, descended and opened the door of the chaise. The moon shone sufficiently for me to make out the humped body of the man I had thrust in so roughly, and opposite, white, shrinking, and in an evident state of terror and agitation, a mighty handsome and engaging miss that stared at me helplessly.

"Is—is he dead?" she asked hoarsely.

"Faith, miss," says I, "I cannot say. Yet I hope not. He's not for worms, I'll warrant. Best get him home and have a surgeon fetched; and if you will acquaint me with the house, I will make so bold as to take you myself."

She waited a moment and then spoke, giving a street in St James's, at which I made her a congee and got upon the box again. I am better astride a nag than with a whip in

my hand, and moreover the night was now pretty dark, yet 'twas not long ere we had reached the house, and, the bell being rung and the servants called, the fat gentleman was got in safely enough. Upon that someone flies for the surgeon, and there was I all alone with the lady, and not loth to clap my peepers on her more nearly. She moved with a style, but had a fearful air, yet it was her face that took me most. She was young and slender and nothing too tall—large-eyed and round of limb, and with a mouth that budded in repose and opened like a flower in speech. But she was very still and white just then.

“I am Sir Philip Caswell’s ward, sir,” she says, very tremulously, “and we are much beholden to you.”

“I am honoured, madam,” said I with a congee again, “to have been of some small service to you.”

“The scoundrels fell upon us by Windmill Street upon our way home,” she continued, with a pretty shudder. “Sir Philip stepped out to face them. I begged he would not, but he is very obstinate.”

“Faith, miss, what could he do less?” said I.

“We might have whipped up and so escaped them,” says she, with an air of some petulance now, “but that our cowardly man took to his heels and left us helpless.”

As she spoke she eyed me with more coldness, I thought, than the occasion warranted, for all she was so shook, and though she had made me her compliments quite prettily, she had spoke as if she were thinking of something else ; which, as you will conceive, nettled me not a little. It was as if she wished me away, for she fell silent and cast glances at the chamber clock that hung at the wall. But seeing I had been at the pains for her and the old fat man, why, says I to myself, rip me if I will go like any discharged lackey. I will tire her out, says I, and let Beauty yawn or pay in gratitude. So I sat on in the saloon, making conversation as it seemed fit to me to serve one of her class and age. No doubt she was tired, for the hour was about two in the morning, yet her pretty yawns, which she feigned to cover with her hands, vexed me. But indeed I might have gone forth and left her there and then for very shame as would have been natural, had it not been that an excuse came to aid me in a message from Sir Philip, who had recovered under the attentions of the surgeon. He had learned, it seemed, that his rescuer was in the house and begged that he might be allowed to thank him in person presently. This set me in feather, but miss in the sulks, as I thought, which maddened me the more that the hussy should

prove so ungrateful, particularly at a time when she should be showing concern at her adventure or, at least, grief for her guardian. Yet as I watched her, perish me but she charmed me with her petulant prettiness the more. Such a dainty head and a mouth so pert and alluring I had never yet clapped eyes on, which I say for all that followed.

There, then, were we set, awaiting Sir Philip, in the big chamber, she yawning without disguise, and me racking my wits to attract her. I'll warrant she must have taken an idea of me as a buck of Town, although she feigned coldness then. I spoke of the play and the Court, of both of which I knew secrets, and I talked on a level proper to the sex.

“D'ye not love the play, miss ?” says I.

“Lard, it is pretty well,” says she, and covered up a yawn with ostentation.

“I doubt not but you have seen *Love in a Tub?*” said I, for I would not be beat by her impudence.

“Maybe,” says she, “I have a poor memory.”

“There was one played in it t'other day like to you, miss,” said I, with significance, thinking to rouse her.

She lifted her eyebrows. “Well, indeed,” says she, indifferently.

"As handsome as I might wish to see—so she was," said I, persisting.

"Why! do you say so?" cries miss. "What a fortunate lady!" and stifles another yawn.

"You favour her, miss," says I, giving her an eye.

"Lard, I favour none, sir," said she, tartly. "I am cross like two sticks that could beat myself," and ere I could find a word in retort she had gone from the room.

If I had followed my first temper I should have marched from the house forthright, being sore to be so used by the minx; but I will admit she had a fascination for me, and wherein my teeth are set there I hold; so that I paced the chamber once or twice and "Faith," says I, angrily, "I will make the little cockatrice sing another tune afore I've done."

And no sooner was I come to this conclusion than the door at the foot of the room opened, and in walks an elegant gentleman. The sound made me turn, and I watched him till he came into the light of the candles, when I cried out sharply—for the face was no other than that which had lain behind the mask in that nocturnal attack. I took some steps across the room and halted by him, so that he might see me as clearly as I saw him.

“ Well, sir,” says I, “ I’ll make bold to say you recognise me,” for I was amazed and disordered by his remarkable appearance in that house.

He looked me up and down. “ Not the least in the world,” says he, coolly, and arranged some nice point in his sleeves. “ Who the devil may you be ? ”

“ Rip me,” says I, angrily. “ The question is not that so much as who be you and what audacity brings you here ? But if you want it you shall have it. My name is Ryder.”

He paused again before he replied to me, and there was no manner of irritation in his voice, but merely languor.

“ Well, Mr Ryder, one good turn deserves another ; so my name is York, and I am a friend of Sir Philip Caswell.”

“ What ! ” said I, mightily taken aback at this rejoinder, as you may suppose, then I laughed. “ S’blood,” I said, “ ’tis a pretty demonstration of friendship to be for striking your bodkin in someone’s belly, as you was an hour ago, you rogue.”

York’s eyebrows lifted at this, but I will admit he had a fine command of himself, which took my admiration, toad as he was. He was a healthy, ruddy man, of looks not displeasing.

“ Indeed,” says he to me, “ why, here is news. Have we Simon Bedlam here,

madam ? ” and he turned to miss, who had entered at that moment. He bowed very low to her, and the colour sprang in her face.

“ Mr York,” she cried, in a fluttered way.

“ Why, you did not look for me so late, madam,” says he, pleasantly. “ But I spied lights, and thought maybe Sir Philip was at his cards and would give me welcome, and the door was open. But I find only,” he concluded, with an indifferent glance on me, “ a Merry Andrew who talks brimstone and looks daggers.”

“ Sir Philip has been attacked,” stammered miss ; “ the surgeon has just left him.”

“ ‘Tis not serious, I trust,” says the fellow, gravely, and when she had faltered out her negative, continued very polite, “ Footpads, I doubt not. The streets are abominable in these days, and the watch is ever asleep.”

But that was too much for me, and I burst forth.

“ Footpads ! ” said I. “ Hear him, miss ? Why, ‘twas the dungfork himself. The mask fell from his face as he fought me, and I saw him plain. I would have you and Sir Philip know what manner of man this is who calls himself friend.”

“ Softly, softly ; you crow loud,” said he, as impudent as ever, and smiling softly. “ Who, d’ye suppose, would credit this cock-

and-bull story ? I profess I know none. Would you, madam ? ” he asked, turning suddenly on the girl.

She hesitated ever so little, and showed some confusion.

“ I—I think the gentleman mistook,” said she. “ I cannot credit such a story. ‘Tis monstrous.”

“ Why, miss,” said I, “ ‘tis true as I am a living man. And as for this muckrake here, why, I will prove it on his skin if he denies it,” and out I whipped my iron, ready for an onfall. But it seemed that he would not budge, and smiled as indifferent as ever. And miss, too, though she showed no colour, regained her composure, and says she, firmly,—

“ ‘Tis monstrous. I cannot believe it. This gentleman is a friend to me and Sir Philip. He is on terms of intimacy. Lard, sir, you surprise me to make such rash statements. Your eyes deceived you, or the dark.”

The man that called himself York nodded impudently. “ That is it, madam,” he says. “ ‘Twas his eyes, no doubt, and the blinking moon. This gentleman, whom I have not the honour of knowing, is doubtless much excited by the event and must be excused. Otherwise . . . ” he shrugged his shoulders significantly, “ I am honoured by the resem-

blance he detects, and, my faith, I shall be seeing my double kick the Triple Beam—so I shall, and curse him for a rogue."

But you may guess that this was too much for me—to stand there quiet and see the cully talk so suave and false, and the girl so credulous, and perilling herself and the house by blind faith in such a villain. Upon his features, moreover, there was a faint grin that spread and counterfeited civility, almost as it were, a leer, and that maddened me ; so that I spoke out pretty hotly.

"'Tis very true what you say, sir," said I, "and there was no witness of what happened save me and old Oliver, the moon. And so the law shall go free of you. Indeed, I have no particular fancy for the law myself. But, perish me, sir," says I, "I detect a mighty resemblance in you to a wheedler that cheated me at dice this night, and, rip me, if I will not run you through the midriff for it."

There was my point towards him, with that little menacing twist of my wrist, such as has served me often in good stead, and he must have seen what sort of kidney he had to deal with, for he gazed at me in surprise, laughed slightly, and made protest with his shoulders, exhibiting some discomposure.

"I would remind you, sir," said he, "that there is a lady here."

"Faith," says I "but she will not be outside, then, and thither you shall go."

York frowned at this and stood for a moment as though he was at a loss for answer. I was not to be put down by a naughty fop like him, with his punctilios, more especially as I was acting in the interests of the lady, so I pressed him with the naked blade.

"Come," says I, "let's see your tricks out of doors."

But at that a voice broke in and stayed me, coming from the door behind.

"Pray, sir," says this, very level and quiet, "what may this scene mean ?"

Round I whipped, and there, on the threshold of the room, was the tall big man that had fought by me, Sir Philip himself, with his arm in a bandage, a cap on his iron-grey hair, and on his face a stern, commanding expression. Out of the tail of my eye I saw miss shrank back against the wall in a posture of alarm. But York was no whit abashed ; he saluted most ceremoniously.

"Good evening, Sir Philip," said he. "Your servant. You are come in time—perish me, in the very nick. Here's a most impudent and amazing case," and he cocks his finger at me. "I have never heard of a more shameless, audacious fellow. Faith, it has made me laugh—so impudent is it ! "

"I should like to know what it is, Mr York, so that I maybe might share the jest," says Sir Philip, with some dryness of tone.

"Why, naturally," returned t'other cheerfully. "Having had the good fortune to rescue you and your ward from a pack of villains, cutpurses or worse, what is my surprise to find installed in your house the very chief of the villains, as impudent as you please. Faith, if it were not so grave 'twould tickle me still."

I must admit that the fellow took me back, and for all I was furious I could not but admire his cool bearing and ready wit. Sir Philip stared at me with a black frown, for I could find nothing for the moment to counter this monstrous brazen charge, but at last I broke out, only with an oath, for sure—so amiss was I.

"You damnable rogue!" said I.

But York goes on as calm as ever. "'Twould be a good thing, sir," says he, looking at me with a kind of wondering interest, "if perhaps the watch was called. For he is a man that can use a weapon, as your arm bears witness, and, indeed, my own skin, too," with which he stroked his elbow gently. Sir Philip had come forward and now began in a formidable voice of anger.

"What!" he cries to me. "you are the ruffian—"

But I was not going to put up meekly under this, and broke out myself.

“Rip me,” said I, “if I have ever heard or seen the like. Why, yonder stands the fellow that was in the assault on your carriage, and 'twas me, Dick Ryder, that thrust him through the elbow as he fell on you.”

Sir Philip's eyes went from one to t'other of us, under his bent black brows, but York's eyebrows were lifted in a feint of amazement.

“Why, Sir Philip,” said he, “you will see from this how an excess of impudence may move a man. It may be that he is drunk that he plays so wildly. You have known me long. Sure, I needn't speak in my own behalf to so preposterous a charge,” and dropped silent with a grand air.

“I have known you long, as you say, sir,” said Sir Philip, slowly, “and I have known you to be a suitor for my ward's hand.”

“I have always had that honour,” said York, with a bow towards miss, “which, unhappily, you have not seen fit to allow me so far. Yet, if any witness is wanted, why, here is your ward herself.”

At that Sir Philip turned as though reminded.

“Lydia,” said he, “what is the truth of this story? We were attacked and rescued.

Was this gentleman in the assault ? ” and he pointed at me.

Miss’s eyes fell ; she was fluttered and her bosom went fast ; and there flashed, I’ll swear, a glance from York.

“ Indeed, sir,” she faltered, “ I could not say. The men were masked.”

“ Ay, so they were,” said he, considering.

“ ’Twas from this one’s face that I took the cover,” put in York, pertly.

“ But certain it is that Mr York rescued us,” went on miss in a faint voice.

At that news I could have reeled under the words, so little was I ripe for them, and so unsuspicious of her.

“ Why,” said I, opening my mouth and stuttering, “ why, ’twas I drove off the pack, and fetched the chaise home. ’Twas I lifted you in and took the reins. The Lord deliver me from this wicked puss ! ”

Sir Philip threw up his sword arm with a gesture of black wrath.

“ ’Tis plain,” said he, “ that one here is a villainous rogue, and if we have not always agreed, Mr York, at least I cannot think you that.”

Miss leaned against the wall white and trembling, and I gave her a congee, very deep and ironical. Truth to say, as soon as I had recovered I had, after my habit, begun to ply

my wits pretty sharply, and already I had taken a notion of how things stood between the two. Moreover, I was not done with yet, and I cast about to be even with the pair. Sir Philip, it seemed, was hostile to the addresses of this York ; and as patently, miss herself was not. The attack, then, must have been part of a plan to gain Miss Lydia's person, to which she was herself privy. What do I then but step in and interfere with the pretty plot ? This was why she bore me no goodwill, no doubt.

“ Well,” says I, with the congee, “ I cannot contest a lady's word, be she Poll or Moll. Let the gentleman have his way.”

Sir Philip, without more ado, turned to him.

“ Mr York,” said he, civilly, “ I beg your pardon for my coldness, which, indeed, had nothing of suspicion. But you must remember that we have never quite agreed. I hope that will mend. I remain greatly in your debt, and I trust you will be good enough to add to my obligations by keeping this man secure until my return. I will have the watch fetched at once.”

“ Nothing will give me greater satisfaction, sir,” says the rogue, cheerfully, and off goes Sir Philip with his black, portentous face, leaving us three there together again. As

for me, I had made up my mind and was feeling my way to some action ; but says York, looking on me pleasantly,—

“ Egad, you’re in a ticklish case. Stab me, you’ve run your head into a noose. Now, why the devil did you yield that way ? I had looked for a good round fight, as good, egad, as we had this evening. And I had begun to have my fears, too—stab me; I did.”

But I paid him no heed then, for I will confess that I was all eyes for Miss Lydia, whose face was very piteous. She was trembling violently and looked out of tragic eyes, and then it came upon me like a flash that she was no party to the lie herself, but had spoken in fear of that bully. Indeed; it may be that she took a distaste of him, as it were, from that scene which began to show from that minute. How else can be explained what ensued ?

“ You had better go, sir,” said she at last, in a whisper.

“ Ay, that’s true,” says York, nodding. “ I had not thought of that. You had better go. The watch will be fetched.”

He looked so comfortable and so friendly, rather than what he was at heart, that my gorge rose of a sudden.

“ Perish me if I will go,” says I. “ If I must hang I must hang.”

Miss started. "Oh!" she cried, and "you must go, oh, you must go, sir! Fly, fly, while there is time."

Here were the two culprits in unison for my withdrawal, which would fetch them out of a scrape, yet how far the girl was involved in the business I had not yet determined. So I pushed her further, as, indeed, I had the right. I folded my arms.

"I am waiting my reward, madam," I said, "something in recognition of my efforts on behalf of yourself and Sir Philip."

But at this she fell into a greater exhibition of distress, imploring me to go, and flitting in agitation 'twixt me and the door, on which she kept anxious watch. Well, thought I, if here's not innocence at least she's in a pickle enough, and I believe I would have gone had it not been for York, whose bearing annoyed me. Besides, I wanted to see how far miss would go, and if her resolution to veil the truth would stand out against the watch and a poor victim haled to prison. Not that I wanted the watch or the law about me nearer than was necessary, for sundry reasons, but I can always trust to my own ingenuity and sword if it comes to the pinch. So I listened to her deafly, and made no sign to go.

"Let him be, Lydia," says York, pleasantly.

“ He’s an obstinate fellow, and, faith, deserves his fate. Let him hang ; I’ll warrant it must have come to that some day.”

But this turns me on him, and I whipped out my blade again in a fury at his insolence ; only Miss Lydia intervened, and, her face very pale, put a hand on my arm.

“ Oh, sir,” says she, very low of voice, but clear and earnest for all that, “ I beg you will not suffer further harm to come to-night. Indeed, but I am ashamed to look you in the face. I will not excuse myself—I will offer no apologies, yet, maybe, you will not think too hardly of me if you know more. My guardian keeps me close. He stands in my way, and will not allow me what is allowed all women. I am not a schoolgirl, sir. I am grown a height,” and she raised herself to her full stature. “ Surely I may have that liberty to command, to choose where I will and whom. Sir, he has sought to make himself all the law to me,” she cries, with heaving bosom. “ And as for his hurt, God knows I did not wish it, and was not privy to it,” and she cast a glance, as I thought, of scorn and reproach at her lover. The eloquence of this new attitude struck me to the reins, tender as I ever was to the wounds of women, though not to be frustrated or deceived by vain pretences.

"He is a hog," says I, "a pig of a man to interfere with you, madam."

But here spoke York, when he had better have held his tongue, yet it was impossible.

"Faith, child," he said lightly, "you have touched him there. Best stop and go no farther. Let it work."

"I will go on," she cried, stamping her foot and turning on him. "I will tell all to this gentleman, all that should be told; for it is his due and meed—a small recompense for the unworthy usage he has had. You have heard him, sir," she says, "and, indeed, your eyes have been witness to his deeds and what he is. My guardian came between us and denied us. And this was *his* plan—to snatch me away by violence while I stood passive, not refusing nor accepting." She wrung her hands in a transport of distress. "I—I was wild . . . I did madly; yet, sir, I would not have you judge me by that. See, it has all ended in trouble, nothing but trouble, and I have gained nothing for myself but shame."

She paused upon the edge of tears, as I could see pretty plain, and says I, bluntly, "You were misled, and by them that should not," and I scowled at York where he stood. But York says nothing, merely lifting his shoulders, and being content, no doubt, to let miss deal with the situation. She sank

her face in her hands, which moved me strangely, for she had a helpless look.

“If I have misjudged, sir, and been mistook,” she said, “can you blame me if I would bury that shame and not have it flaunted in my face?”

“Not I, madam,” said I. “I would I might help you, troth I do.”

“You can,” she cried, sparkling shyly and eagerly upon me.

“Why . . . ,” says I.

“If you will go, sir, there will be no trouble, no inquiry, and no law will be set in motion. ‘Twill die a quiet death, and nothing will be digged up against me. I shall not have to tell the truth, as I shall have else,” she cried. Her lips parted in her fever, her eyes burning with a wild zeal.

York uttered a sound, but I was silent.

“Oh, sir!” she pleaded.

“Why,” I said, with a laugh. “It seems I must condone wounds and abduction and all.”

“ ‘Tis on me the brunt will fall—the shame and scandal,” she urged, and, looking in her pretty face, I could resist no longer, for I’ll swear she was genuine, and had been misled by that muckrake.

“I will go,” says I, and then of a sudden remembered. “But how am I to escape?” says I.

“By the window,” she said, pointing to it with animation.

“Why, to be sure,” says I, slowly, for I was taken with a notion, “but there is this gentleman who is my guard.”

“Oh!” says she, archly, “I think your sword is better than his, and he will not stay you.”

“True,” says I, “but ‘tis best to be prudent and to avoid Sir Philip’s suspicions. He must have some marks of a struggle. Either I must leave him with a wound, or senseless, or gagged and bound . . . or maybe suspicion will come to rest on you,” madam.

Her brows were bent in a little frown. “That is true,” she said, and turned to York, whose face for the first time, as I could see, wore a look of discomposure.

“He must be bound and gagged,” says I, shaking my head.

“Ye-es,” she says, hesitatingly.

Whereupon I went forward to the fellow, who gnawed his lip and fidgeted. He looked at Miss Lydia as if about to speak, and then shot an angry glance at me, but paused.

“Oh, very well,” says he, at last, with a grin, “but pray make haste of you will be surprised in the middle of your job—” and he had the air of yielding himself with good humour. But I knew what must be his

chagrin, though I admired him for his manner. He would have done pretty well on the road if he could have put by his scurvy way with women. Yet I was not for letting him off, after what he had done, so, withdrawing the cords from the window curtains, I tied him pretty quickly in a fast enough bundle. But when, his arms being lashed behind, I approached with a wedge of wood, York cried out in protest.

“I’ll have none of that,” said he.

“He must be gagged,” says I to the lady, appealing to her. She hesitated, and, looking on him, appeared to take pity ; or maybe she was afraid of him.

“Perhaps it is not necessary,” she said.

“Why, look you, madam,” said I, earnestly, “we must convince Sir Philip of our good faith ; else he will smell out this trickery and all our pains are thrown away.”

She made no answer and with the wedge I moved a step nearer to York, who grimaced and cried out with an oath,—

“May I be—”

But ere he could get it forth I had it between his teeth, and with my knee in his wind threw him in a heap upon the floor. Miss Lydia looked on with open eyes, and with an air of uncertainty.

What she would have said I know not, but

at that moment there was a sound without the door, and she broke out.

“ Go—go,” she cried, running to me. “ You can go now in safety.”

“ Yes, 'tis time I was gone if I am to keep the bargain,” said I, looking with a grin on York, who was wriggling on the floor.

I gave miss a congee, and backed to the window. “ If you will credit me, madam,” says I, “ you will think twice ere you take up with York there.”

“ I know, I know,” says she, eagerly, for she was terrified of the sounds outside. “ I will be wise, I promise you.”

Her skirts swung against me, and that touch on my arm sent through me an amazing thrill, so that, beholding her so vastly handsome and passionate at my elbow, my blood fired at the sight.

“ Madam,” said I, very grave, “ I had thought to do you some good, and that privilege would have been my reward. But I find myself only to have plunged you in embarrassments, for which may I be whipped. What get I for my pains, then ? Why, nothing, not even the private consolation to have relieved you ; and in this escape what touches me is not so much the ignominy as the deprivation of these eyes of one they would have dwelled on always.”

'Twas not ill phrased, as you will admit, and I got it off with unction, her face being so close to me, and devilish enticing. The sounds were not now audible, and I was at the window, so that I suppose she had forgot her tremors. A demure look crept in her face under my boldness, and says she softly,—

“ What would you have me do ? ”

“ Oh, madam,” said I, burning on her. “ Look up, look up, I pray you, and I'll warrant you'll read me as clear as a book.”

“ I cannot guess, sir,” says she, looking up with her innocent eyes all the same, while from the floor there was a choking sound which, maybe, was the dust in York's nostrils. Miss looked round.

“ We are keeping Mr York in an uncomfortable position,” says she, sweetly. “ 'Tis not a pleasant posture to lie in.”

“ Faith,” said I, boldly, “ I would lie so all night if I might get what I want now.”

“ What is it you want ? ” says she, opening her eyes in wonder.

“ Why, what I will take, and suffer all risks,” says I of a sudden. With which I put my arm about her swiftly and carried her face to mine. Miss Lydia called out “ Oh ! ” and the gag was shaken with uncouth, unintelligible sounds. A noise streamed out of the hall.

"Go, go!" cries she, pink of face and sparkling, and seeing my time was come I turned and went, leaving the gag still spluttering in the corner.

THE GENTLEMANLY HABERDASHER

I HAVE dealt in my time with traps and catchpolls of many colours ; I have treated with justices and officers of the law that were mighty difficult ; and I have encountered innumerable rough bucks that have pressed me badly. But give me them all rather than a pack of silly, screaming women that know not their own mind for two minutes on end. Many times have I adventured the sex in one way or another, and I can claim to have been esteemed by them, from milkmaids to ladies, even to my Lady Barbara, Duchess of Cleveland. But I will confess that my heart beats too soft in me to confront them rightly. I cannot abide tears nor a swollen countenance ; and a petticoat catches me ; and there it is. Not that I am a fool where women are concerned, for on occasion there is no harder flint than Dick Ryder, as is known in the four quarters of the kingdom. But I lean to mercy and consideration, and particularly if I be in a good humour or in liquor.

'Twas in a frolic mood that I met the wench

of the Magpie, which meeting led to an evening's entertainment, tolerably humour-some, but something "pretty-missy" for a stark man like me. I was newly come from the Bath Road with my purse full of king's pictures, to the which I had added on Turnham Green without so much as a thought of it. 'Twas fallen dark of a foul December evening, and, as I was riding for town, I missed the road and Calypso floundered into a bog of water and mire. With a curse I pulled her out, when just at that moment I heard a voice crying out a little way off. The common oozed mud, for the rain had been falling heavily, but I pushed the mare across in the direction of the voice, and there was another that had fallen into my plight, but much worse. For a chaise had wandered off the road and was axle-deep in a pond that spreads on the common.

"Help!" says the voice.

"That I will! Help you and myself, too," says I; and I gave a hand to the coachman and together we got the carriage to land.

"I am much in your debt, sir," says the master of it when we were done—a smug-speaking sort of fellow whose face I could not see. "You have placed Samuel Hogg, haberdasher, of Bristol, under obligations," he said pompously.

"Oh, you are in my debt, 'tis no doubt," says I, laughing, "but, rip me, you won't be long ;" and at that I delivered him of a pile of gold guineas, and turned my back on his entreaties and objurgations.

When I was come to town I put up at my favourite inn and where I am known, and on the next day I set out for Polly Scarlet's. But when I got there, there was my poor girl abed with a swollen cheek. So, says I, giving her good cheer and a certain trinket that I had for her, I will make the best of my way to Soho and see if, maybe, some of the lads be assembled. But I had got no further than the Minories, when who should emerge into sight in the company of two officers, but Timothy Grubbe, that rascally thief-taker, crimp and scoundrel. I am not to be frightened by any man on earth, but 'twas wise to go shy of Timothy and his friends at that time ; so ere they had a sight of me I turned my back on them and slipped in at the Magpie tavern. Here was a warm room and comfortable, and the wine, when mulled, was passable, though sour. So I tossed off a draught and says to the wench, ironically,—

"To bring out the flavour of this tap, I'll eat cheese, my dear. 'Tis a wine worth testing," says I.

Thereat she fetched me cheese, and stood

staring on a ring that she wore on her finger, a little in the shadow. Well, I sat idly there, sipping at my glass, for 'twas pleasant enough, and quiet. 'Twas a bare, empty tap, as it chanced, and the wench and I had it to ourselves. She was a pretty sort of figure, all in white—white mob and white apron ; of a middle height and slightness pleasant in so young a maid, brisk of eye, quick of face, and with a certain abruptness of chin. She stood, as I say, staring on a ring, in a brooding seriousness, and then of a sudden she uttered a little sob and rushed her apron to her eye.

“Whoa !” says I. “Whoa there, mare,” speaking softly enough, but she started up and turned about, so that her face was no longer in the light, and so remained a little while.

“Come, my pretty,” said I in a good-humoured way. “Wash no colour from that blue. I’ll warrant ’tis admired, and rightly. If there’s any huff or bully that breeds those dew-drops give me his name, and on my word, I’ll make carrion of him.”

At that she turned to me again, holding herself erect, and her eyes discharged at me a glance. 'Twas not one of haughtiness merely, but rather one in which fear and defiance and anger rubbed shoulders. One might have said, indeed, that all these sentiments rained together from her pretty peepers. But then

she dropped her head as quickly, and affected her interest in the bottles or the casks or something else in the distance.

“Why,” says I, “I will even taste once more that delectable bin,” and she came forth, reluctant, to fill my glass again. “Now,” says I, when I had her there, “you’re a girl of spirit ; rip me, what’s amiss ?”

“Sir ?” she says with a glare in her face.

“Come, if every pretty filly used her hind legs so hard,” said I with a laugh, “what room would be left in the stalls ?”

She said no word but went about her business, the which, as I am not used to rebuffs either from man, madam, or maid, nettled me ; but I know such wildings ; they be not pigeons nor doves nor tame sparrows neither. I must lime her with another manner ; so I altered my voice, and says I, in a pleasant, but masterful, tone,—

“You must not think me any Peeping Tom,” I said, “to twist his eyes on you and badger you. Tears spoil that handsome cheek, and I would know if there be no remedy. I cannot abide to see youth and beauty weeping.”

She had turned her head now, and gave me a searching glance. “ ’Tis naught you could help in, sir,” she says with some demureness,

and then broke out, "'tis along of my aunt. She has put upon me and treated me ill."

"A hag of an aunt," says I sympathetically, "to bruise one so tender and so dutiful, I'll swear."

"Yes, 'tis so," says she, now with some confidence, and wagging her little head towards me. "She knows not when she is well-served—that she doth not."

"I'll take oath of that," says I.

"I am daughter to her husband's sister, sir," said she, running on glibly by this time, "and Cousin Tom is sib to me."

"Why, for sure, if he be your cousin," said I.

"And when my mother died," she said, taking no heed, "uncle says I must live with him, and there have I lived all these years."

"None so many, rip me," says I, handsomely.

"He has had good service out of me," she said, casting me a glance, as of one who would assert her rights. "There have I worked for my Aunt Susan and cast up figures for uncle, and no thanks given me—no, not a crown's worth all these years."

"A sorry pair of skinflints," said I, nodding. "But I would not cry tears on them, not I, if I was a spirited wench."

"'Tis not that," says she, weeping anew.

“ ‘Tis that I am turned out of doors ; they will not have me more.”

“ Why, how is that ? ” I asked, whereat she looked demure as a saint, and says she,—

“ Oh, ‘twas but nothing. ‘Twas Cousin Tom.”

And it appeared that Cousin Tom had set calf’s eyes on her, and that his mother destined him for better things ; so that the wench must quit, though she kept the tally for nunkie and the house for aunt.

“ Well,” says I, “ ‘tis a piece of injustice, my dear, and that I’ll swear to. Love you this Tom ? ”

Whereat she hesitated, and stammered, and turned aside her face, and then heaved up her pretty shoulders.

“ He is so silly,” says she.

“ Why, that is the right kind of silliness for a maid, I’ll take oath,” said I.

But she said nothing, so I tossed a guinea on the table, for I had just taken a fancy to a little entertainment, having nothing to do and being at a loose end by reason of Polly.

“ There’s that will pay for a bottle of wine,” said I, “ the which I will put under my jacket by your leave, mistress. And I will be the one to pull you out of your despair.”

She looked at me in surprise.

“ Oh, I have an eye for a wench,” said I,

" and I know virtue when it peeps out. And if so be you want Tom, rip me, you shall have him."

" I do not understand you, sir," said she, still wondering.

" See you here, mistress," says I, with a wink, " if you was known to be in the expectation of money," says I, " maybe auntie would sing to another tune."

" Yes," said she, with her mouth open and her eyes.

" Very well," said I, " a gentlemanly haberdasher has clapped eyes on a pretty miss and taken a fancy to her for a daughter."

She stared at me.

" Say that here sits the haberdasher," said I, cocking an eye at her, " a gentlemanly haberdasher that is a widower and is peaking for a daughter that he will never get," says I, " what says auntie and nunkie now ? "

She met my glance and presently hers fell. I could see she was quick of wit and took me now.

" But, sir, I do not know who you be," said she, demurely, and fidgeting with her apron.

" Oh, we will better that," says I, remembering of the man on Turnham Green. " Call me Samuel Hogg," said I, " godly Samuel Hogg, of Bristol, that wants a daughter all to himself and is willing to leave her a hundred

guineas for a dowry and a thousand on his deathbed."

Her lips parted and her eyes gleamed. Then she gave me a shrewd glance, for she was no fool, and at last she smiled.

"You are very kind," said she.

"Pooh!" said I, emptying the bottle. "You may say that when I see you this evening and confront 'em."

"Confront 'em," she said.

"D'ye suppose I will not pursue that which I propose?" I asked. "I will see auntie, nunkie and all, and so you may warn 'em. The gentlemanly haberdasher, rip me, will visit 'em to-night, for to beg their niece of 'em."

'Twas on that understanding we parted, though I believe the girl thought me gone in liquor and talking foolishly. But that I was not, as she discovered, for I meant to go through with the jest and help a poor female against her shrew of an aunt at the same time.

So that evening when it had fallen dark, sure enough, I presented myself before the Magpie, clothed very old and sober and with a wig to suit, and knocked for admittance. Well, there were they assembled to meet me (for the wench had done her part), looking very expectant and all in a flutter. There was uncle that was broad and short

and of a weak cast of face with a grin on it, and by him was aunt, prim and stiff, but the vinegar of her face sugared over with a smile ; and to these were added Cousin Tom, a lubberly big fellow with a booby expression, and a couple more. Why, had I not been used to distinguished company I might have turned white of trembling and bashfulness before them. But as it was, the more the merrier, and, says I, with a congee to aunt,—

“ By your leave, madam.”

“ Sir,” says she, “ our niece Nancy has acquainted us with your story ; ” at which, thinks I, “ 'Egad I'm glad I know her name,” the which I had misremembered to ask.

“ She hath done me honour, mistress,” I replied, polite as a pea. “ And since you know why I am here, faith, let us sit down and discuss of it.”

Uncle sat down, blinking rapidly at us, and a little fat man in the corner eyed me curiously.

“ Your sister's daughter, my good man ? ” says I to uncle, with a benevolent smile. He nodded.

“ And a very precious daughter she has been to us, sir,” says aunt with a sort of whine.

Now that kind fairly makes my stomach queasy, and, moreover, I guessed what she was after. She meant to pull a long face on parting with her niece, with an eye to money.

"I hope," said I, suavely, "that she will prove a precious daughter to me in good time."

"That depends," says the little fat man, who, it seems, was a grocer.

"Ay, that depends," says the remaining person in the room, a thin, elderly woman.

"Well," said I, annoyed at this intervention, "it depends on whether miss here suits me. I will confess she has took my fancy, and I have room for her."

"You want to adopt Nancy?" says the aunt.

"'Tis my intention," I answered plump.

"May we ask what set the notion in your head?" says the grocer from his corner.

"Faith you may," said I, "and 'tis easy said. For walking down the Minories yesterday, whom did I spy but a handsome miss with as two pretty eyes as ever sparkled in a wench's face. 'She's for me,' says I to myself, 'she'll suit my town house like a linnet or a piping lark. I'll warrant she's all sunshine.'"

At that I thought they looked on me with some suspicion, and, perish me, I believe I had spoken too warmly, for she was dainty enough.

"Oh!" says aunt, faintly, and glanced at her husband, as if inviting him to speak, but he sat smoking.

" My niece says you are a godly man, sir ? " she pursued.

" Godly," says I, " is not the word. I cry second to none if it comes to church and prayers."

She looked astonished at that, but 'twas the grocer who spoke next.

" 'Tis a strange matter," he said, " that you should have took so great a fancy to Miss Nancy here. It may be, as you say, that you would adopt her, yet you are young for a daughter."

" Young ! " said I, " why, I be ancient enough. I have gone through enough in my time to fetch out grey hairs in bunches. There was my poor wife that died ten years gone, and my daughter that followed her in the flower of her youth, to whom miss hath a most singular likeness. 'Twas that attracted me."

" You are a haberdasher, sir ? " says the thin woman.

" 'Tis my calling," I replied.

" Ah," she sighed. " And so 'twas my poor husband's that is at rest."

" He was engaged in an honourable trade," said I.

" You say truly. That he was," she assented, sighing.

But here uncle spoke for the first time. He

was clearly no man of words, but the fat grocer had been whispering in his ears.

"We should want some warranty," said he.

"Warranty," said I indignantly. "There's my name, Samuel Hogg, of Bristol, and, for the rest, if it is the colour you wish, why I can satisfy you," and I brought out a purse full of King's pictures.

I could see that their eyes glistened.

"You seem well endowed," said the grocer.

"Ay, and 'tis all at the disposal of Miss Nancy, when I am in my gloomy tomb," said I.

But the grocer whispered to the widow, and she to aunt, and they glanced askance at me. So, as matters were not going forward to my taste, I got up and said I,—

"It seems that suspicions rule here. I am the target of eyes. Rip me, I carry not my wares to a market that fancies me not, and so I will bid you good evening."

But that shook them. "Stay, sir," says the aunt, "I am sure we may be pardoned if we hesitate to lose one so dear to us. 'Tis a new idea, and we must get used to it."

"Why," said I, smiling, for I could see the drift of her thoughts, "there is no haste. You shall satisfy yourself of what I promise. 'Tis but the preliminary to my design. I will not pluck your partridge from you roughly—not

I. But I would have her remain with you during my preparations, and only ask that I may present her with that which shall fit her out as becomes one who is to do honour to my house and me."

And with that I opened the purse and counted out ten golden guineas.

Miss Nancy gazed wide-eyed, and there was a little silence among the others, save that uncle started and rubbed his eyes, and cried, "The devil!"

But 'twas enough for them. Auntie melted like a snowball in the sun ; the grocer pursed up his lips ; and the widow regarded me with wonder. Booby, in his corner, gave vent to a silly chuckle.

"Well, that's fair," said uncle hastily, and, at that, supper being ready, I was invited to join them.

Now this was the time that I should have taken to go, for I had done what I promised ; but I had nothing to attract me that night, and, moreover, I was for pushing the fun a little further. Lord, if Tony or old Creech could have seen me a-sitting there, in such company, with an adopted daughter on my hands, 'twould have made them split their sides. So says I,—

"At your service, and thank ye ;" and down we sat to the table.

As chance would have it I was set alongside of the widow, and on t'other side was the grocer. Says I to the girl in a whisper, as she passed me,—

“ There ; 'tis all laid for you, and you can fire the train when you will, along of Booby.”

She cast a glance at me and looked down, fingering her guineas as if she loved 'em. But, bless you, I did not mind the guineas. There was plenty more behind 'em. And then the widow turns on me, and begins to ply me with questions about haberdashery and prices, but, rot me, I knew nothing about them more than the babe in its cradle. So said I presently,—

“ Madam, I leave all such trifles to my man.”

“ Heavens ! ” says she, “ you will be ruined. 'Tis most perilous. You want someone that will look after your interests, and keep your house in trim.”

“ Why, that's what miss will do,” I laughed.

She shrugged her shoulders. “ My husband,” said she, “ was worth his two hundred guineas a year, and that's all come to me, alas,” she says sighing.

“ 'Tis not I would cry ' Alack,' if that befel me,” I said with a grin.

“ Ah, 'tis not the money,” she says, “ but the loneliness ; and to think that it's all lost to business ; for I am my own mistress,” she

says, " and can do what I like, having no child to consider."

" Well," said I, " I have one now, and an amazing beauty." She looked sourly at Miss Nancy, who flushed very deep. Just then I was digged in the ribs t'other side, and, turning, found the grocer with a grin on his face.

" Pretty wench," says he with a wink.

" That is so," said I, tossing off the wine, which was not so ill.

" There's none too many like her about the town," he says again with his significant wink.

" What the plague—" says I, but he winked again.

" I seen what you was after from the first," he said.

" The devil you did ! " I said, and stared at him.

He dug his thumb into me again. " Ten guineas for her ! " he said with a knowing air.

" Well ? " said I, for I guessed what the fool was after.

" Well," says he in his fat whisper, " you ain't no haberdasher. I seen through you from the first."

" Look you," said I sharply, " get on with your supper and keep your foul fingers off me, or I will choke your weasand for you."

That, as I conceive, startled him, for he fell away, looking at me mighty anxiously, but

said no more. Moreover, I was not for turning the party into pepper and mustard, so I took another glass, and the vintner at t'other end of the table nodded at me in a friendly way.

“ ‘Tis a good bottle,” says he knowingly, “ and not every man’s liquor.”

That was true enough, for ‘twas not the swipes I had took in his tavern that afternoon, and he himself was witness to his words, for he had drunk the better part of a bottle already and seemed very merry and on familiar terms with the world. He plied the widow on one side and his wife on t’other, but aunt’s visage, for all her simper, would have turned the best wine sour. Miss took but a sip of wine, but her face was flushed and eager, but Booby—he made up for that abstinence, and drank and talked and laughed as though he was at a goose-fair. Well, they were a pretty party, and by this time I was entered into the proper spirit of it. Booby over the way made a feint of embracing miss and whispered in her ear, seeing which I bestowed a smile on him as who should say “ Brava ! I commend your spirit.” But miss turned away from him sharply and I could see she was firing him a rejoinder. Thinks I, maybe he hath crushed her steels, the which no woman will stand, and the least of all in public. But as ‘twas to settle their little affairs that I

was there the time had come to speak out, and so up jumps I with my glass in hand.

"I will ask this company," said I, "to toast a pretty girl and her lover. I'll warrant their names spring to your minds. Need I put a style on them? Well, when these hairs be whitening, sure I shall be comforted in a nursery of babes that shall bring 'em tenderly to the grave, all along of my adopted daughter there and Cousin Tom that shall inherit my fortune."

Now aunt's face was lined with smiles, and she lifted up her glass, and looked towards the couple. The vintner, too, chuckled and called out an indelicate jest for such maidenly ears. But what was my surprise that miss turned crimson, and then pale, and started up with a little exclamation. Booby looked sheepish and grinned, but she gave him her shoulder, and,—

"I will not have you drink it," says she tartly. "I am my own mistress, and not to be dictated to by any."

"Why, child, who is dictating to you?" said I amazed, and aunt frowned, but says sweetly,—

"We have known all along 'twas a strong attachment 'twixt my son and niece."

"Why, so I should ha' guessed," I replied.

"No, no," says uncle, shaking his silly head,

"I never did believe there was aught in it. So now you know, wife."

But his wife, who was as black as night, cried out sharply,—

"'Tis all nonsense. They are affianced duly."

And then the fat grocer muttered in my ears, "'Twas precious cunning ; you have noosed and caught her already. Gad, she'll fall into your maw like a ripe plum!"

"If you will not cease," said I angrily, "I will run my hilt down your throat."

"Hilt!" says he, staring, and edged away from me ; and I could see him eyeing me up and down to see if I carried a weapon.

"Come," said I to the girl. "Maybe this is sprung on you too suddenly. Take your time," I said, "and we will wait. 'Tis a hundred guineas on your wedding, my dear, and much more at my funeral."

"I do not want your money," said she petulantly, and flung the guineas on the table.

Aunt cried out in a fury, and uncle stared, for he was much in liquor. But the grocer and the widow began hurriedly to gather them up.

"Steady," said I. "Whoa, my lass. What's come over you ? This suits not with your mood this afternoon. I will admit Booby is no beauty and hath a tongue too gross for his phiz, but 'tis your own choice."

“ Whom call you Booby ? ” cries the youth, rising in a passion that was compounded of wine and jealousy.

“ If you will not sit down,” said I, “ I will teach you a lesson. Sit down and buss, you fool. Buss and be thankful.”

He flopped into his seat foolishly, but miss rose and moved from the table. “ I will not stay here for insult,” she said, with spirit.

“ You shall not refuse,” says aunt, white with anger, “ or you shall be turned out of doors this very night, you shall.”

“ Oh, she is a sly slut ; she casts her eyes high,” says the widow, in a high vindictive note.

“ Look ye here,” says the vintner sillily, and with a tipsy frown. “ Let us not tangle this merry meeting into knots. Be easy all. If Nancy wants a husband, as well she may, being of a marriageable age, here’s one for her, and no better than he—Mr Samuel Hogg, of Bristol. Sir, I toast you and Nancy as bride and groom.”

I looked at the girl. She had come to a pause and now stood, her face demurely cast down, and she said nothing, not raising any protest. And then, in a flash, it came to me what she wanted. I could have laughed aloud if I had been in my own company. She took me for a real well-to-do haberdasher and would

have me, the puss ; or maybe 'twas my looks took her, for she is not the first to be tantalised by my bearing. But I had not bargained for this, and so I laughed a little, and looked askew at the vintner.

"How!" says I, "will you turn a daughter into a wife?"

"'Tis infamous," says the widow. "'Tis shocking to the ordinances of religion."

"Not so fast," said I. "She's no daughter to me yet, nor perhaps will be," for I was weary of her hints and innuendoes, the meaning of which was apparent.

"Oh, maybe he can find room for you both," says the grocer, with his fat laugh.

"Though 'tis my only niece," says the vintner, pursuing his theme, as if none had spoken, "I will spare her to so worthy a gentleman. I have known her since she was a chit so high—my own sister's child!" and he began to weep maudlin tears that came of the drink.

"I'm sure," says the widow, "that the gentleman will be well rid of such an ungrateful baggage, and 'tis an insult to use him so. He does not want a silly slip like that, either to daughter or wife, undutiful as she would be, and extravagant in her habit. What would suit you, sir," she says, turning on me, "would be a staid comely wife near to your

own age, with a knowledge of haberdashery, and some money to—”

“ Will you be quiet,” says I to her, savagely.

“ He’s got his eye on the young ‘un ; he’s marked her,” says the fat grocer, dipping his nose in the wine, “ I knew it all along. There’s mighty little chance to deceive me. I know these dogs. Why, directly he came in I saw a look on him when he eyed her that—”

“ Look here, I have warned you once,” says I, infuriated, and I gave him a blow under his fat chin that sent him sprawling over the next chair to the floor. At that the widow screamed out and cries,—

“ Murder ! murder ! ”

I was for turning on her, for my blood was up at this silliness, when the vintner got upon his legs unsteadily.

“ I will have no murder done in my house,” says he, with a hiccough. “ I will fight any man that is for doing murder in my house.”

But ere I could answer Booby rushed at me. “ I’ll have your blood,” he cried. And when I would have treated him as I had done the grocer, the widow put her arms about me and squealed that I was being killed, while miss clung to Booby behind and strove to pull him off with her hands and nails.

“ Oh, sir, oh, sir, ‘tis a Christian house,” cries aunt, wringing her hands.

But, Christian or not, I was not for being choked by the old cat, and so I threw her off roughly ; but a blow from the vintner took me in the stomach, so that all my wind was out. He was whirling his arms like a mill.

“ I’ll learn you to do murder,” cries he.

’Twas too much for me. I had been sorely tried by their stupidity, and to have them falling on me was more than I could stand.

“ Rip me,” says I, “ as sure as my name is Dick Ryder I’ll lay a corpse out if you do not leave me.”

“ Dick Ryder ! ” cries Miss Nancy, letting go of Booby, who toppled over upon the grocer.

“ Yes,” says I, “ Dick Ryder, who is mightily sorry that he ever set forth to do any kindness to a ninny like you.”

“ Ay,” says a voice behind me, “ ’tis Dick Ryder for sure, young woman.”

I turned at the sound, and on the steps, descending from the tavern, was Timothy Grubbe, with the face of a trap behind him.

“ Dick Ryder,” says he, with a grin, “ I arrest you in the name of His Majesty for the robbery of one Samuel Hogg, on Turnham Green, last night.”

“ Is that you, Timothy ? ” said I, for I never minded the wretch. “ Why, come in

and welcome. You come in the nick of time to prevent murder."

"Why, I see you have been very merry," says he, with his leer.

I tapped the vintner on the shoulder. "Here is a party," I said, "that will drink my health. I beg you to open a bottle of your best for these good friends of mine. How many be you, Timothy?" I asked.

"Call it three, Dick," says he with his tongue in his cheek.

"Make it two bottles, host," said I cheerily.

The vintner, with his mouth open, now coming to his sober senses, stared at the visitors and at me; but in obedience to my command, he moved slowly towards the tap-room door, where Grubbe and the trap stood. I followed him, and had, out of the tail of my eye, a glimpse of the wench—struck dumb and terrified.

"As touching the guineas of Hogg, Timothy," said I, "you will find 'em on that scratch-cat over yonder, with the red nose. She is an old hand, Timothy, and hath a maw for gold, so she hath."

At that the widow started up, protesting and crying out that she knew nothing of it, and she was innocent, and that he would spare her and the Lord knows what. So I was avenged on her, the vain old noodle.

But I paid no heed, only walked up behind the vintner till I came abreast of Grubbe, who grinned at me as he eyed me carefully.

“ ‘Twas not so skilful as usual, Dick,” says he, “ ‘twas a boggle—a blunder.”

“ Well, there’s no boggle this time,” said I shortly, and of a sudden put my foot under him sharply, knocked away his leg and sent him flying into the room on the top of Booby, who was standing, mouth open. And next moment I thrust the solid body of the vintner in the face of the trap and toppled ‘em both over. That done, I clapped to the door instantaneous and darted through the dark tavern and into the road. There was no one there, so that I knew that Grubbe had lied, or else he had posted a man behind the house, never thinking I should break out in front. Once in the road I ran through the blackness of the night, and, ere the pursuit was after me, was safe in a hiding-place I know, cursing myself for a fool to have wasted my time and temper on a pack of asses.

THE MAN IN BLACK

IT was after the affair of the King's treasure that there was maybe the hottest hue and cry raised on me which has ever fallen to my lot in the course of many adventurous years. The pursuit opened in a little tavern in Southwark, where I was foolish enough to spend a night and some guineas in entertaining a pack of rude huffs that did not know a gentleman from a dung-fork. I had took too much of liquor, and I suppose that I had spoke too much also. At least, at three of the morning comes me up the landlord, a decent fellow, with the news that the traps were on me. I hardly rubbed my eyes, for the fumes were all gone now, but skipped into my clothes, and, giving him good-day, was out afoot in a twinkling by a back window, and made for Clapham. Here, as chance had it, I encountered a stout man on his horse coming up for the fair, and, laying him in the mud, I mounted and rode as hard as the nag would carry me towards the south.

I passed through Kingston in the thick of the darkness, and made for the wilds beyond,

only pulling in when I had reached the village of Ripley in the dawn. 'Twas bitter cold of a raw January day, and the sun was in a grey welter of clouds that betokened snow. So I drank a hot draught of ale and brandy, and, giving my nag a bite, was on the road again, for I knew not how near the enemy might be, and I had vowed to put ten leagues behind me ere I lay anywhere. The way was vile in that weather, but I pushed on through Guildford, and at last came to Liphook, where I sheltered for the night. Now what was my predicament on the morrow but to find the nag lame and myself in chains to the spot ! But I had covered a long distance, and so says I to myself, I will rest and give odds to fortune. So I tarried there, pretty comfortable.

But in the afternoon there comes along a stage from town, in the which, having spied the ground very carefully, I decided to journey ; for I had by now made up my mind to reach Portsmouth, and ply between there and Southampton and the west, until such time as the chase was over. So in goes I, much against my habit, along with a company that seemed at first little to my taste. There was a respectable old gentleman that was full of questions ; and madam, his wife, that was fat and slumberous ; and to them was a

daughter, pretty enough, but with eyes that marched and countermarched, and usually upon a young man that was dressed like a Court popinjay. This fellow, as I discovered, was her lover, Harringay by name, and a pretty cupid he was. The last in the coach was a staid-faced, sober-clad man, all in a dark kerseymere, that had come in with me at Liphook, and read a book while 'twas light and between the jolts. This was dull company, as you may guess, for Dick Ryder to find himself in, all save the girl, whose eyes went on a campaign with mine. So, thinks I, if I must be here for some drab hours, I will at least take some merriment of it, and so I fell to ogling her, at which she minced and took on a better colour.

'Twas in the act that the old gentleman broke the silence by addressing me. Snow had fallen in the night, and 'twas now darkening for more. Out on the Sussex waste tumbled the stage, and of a sudden took the wind. It heeled her over, and the horses stayed and swayed.

"Heaven save us ! We are overturned !" cried the old fellow, looking at me.

"Not we," said I. "Why, 'twould take all the breath of two heavens to capsize this old village."

"You think 'tis safe ?" says he anxiously.

"As safe as a snail," said I, "and about as speedy. Confound all such conveyances!" said I. "Give me a horse atwixt my legs and I ask no more."

"You are a soldier, sir?" said he.

"You may call me that," says I—"a soldier of fortune."

"I knew it," says miss, beaming; and at that the wind took us again, and the stage jolted on her creaking wheels, sending miss into my arms, and the old lady upon the thin black fellow.

Miss got herself back with my assistance, blushing ripe and red, and the old lady cries,—

"Geoffrey, my smelling-salts! Herringay, tuck my skirts down." At which the popinjay began fumbling in his pockets, and with a sulky air stooped to do as he was bid. T'other man feigned to go on reading, but it was too dark now to see print.

"I have no taste for these common stages," says Herringay, presently, in a fluting voice of affectation. "If I had my way, I would travel by private coach."

"Maybe," said I, "you cannot stride a horse."

"Indeed," said he, loftily, "I am quite accustomed to it."

"'Tis the only way of progression," I said. "A stout nag and a pair of barkers."

"Ah," said the old man admiringly, "you soldiers see strange things."

"I'll warrant, yes," said I. "I could tell you that which would make your hair stand."

Miss was gaping at me, and so was the whole family, but young Harringay crossed his legs, and says he indifferently,—

"'Tis said soldiers have long tongues."

"Why, they have long swords," said I peremptorily, for I was annoyed by his airs and graces.

He gave a little laugh, as if he were amused with something all to himself; and I was aware at the same time that the man in black was eyeing me steadily. He had the look of a lawyer's clerk, or something of the sort, so I returned him his stare with nonchalance. This made him give way, and he turned his attention to the party opposite, for there could be no pretence now of reading a page.

"You go armed always, sir?" inquired the old gentleman.

"One never knows whom one may meet," said I, with a yawn.

"You signify highwaymen?" he said in a lower voice.

"Why, I'm told there is danger from these gentry," said I.

Harringay laughed lightly.

"Pooh!" he says. "They are main

cowards, and would not attack any man with boldness and a pistol."

The man in black looked at him with interest.

" You carry a pistol, sir ? " I asked politely of the popinjay.

He tapped his pocket significantly.

" There is none would dare assail me," he boasted ; and miss cast him a glance of admiration.

" We put ourselves in Mr Harringay's hands," explained the old gentleman cheerily. " He is our escort."

I thought I saw a smile on the face of the man in black, and I could not help meeting it ; but his suddenly faded away, and he looked out at the moor, on which the snow and the wind were threshing. The old coach was lurching on, as if she had been a packet in a storm.

" I shall be sick. My stomach heaves," cried the fat woman, and applied her smelling-salts ; whereat she was attended by her husband and her daughter, and, lying back, seemed to pass off into sleep.

" 'Tis a wild night," says the old man. " I misdoubt we shall fetch Petersfield."

" Why, that we shall," said I cheerfully, " unless these same gentry you speak of play us a trick."

" Do you think it likely ? " inquired a voice in my ear ; and there was the man in black, broken out of silence for the first time.

" Maybe," said I indifferently, " and maybe not."

" Why," he says, in a raucous voice, " there is nothing here to tempt any such. What is there among us all ? "

" Speak for yourself," said I. " I have that which I would not part with willingly."

" And I, sir," said the old gentleman. " But with three such young gentlemen to protect us we need fear nothing."

" Well, I will confess I wouldn't care to be stopped," says the man in black. " But they would not have much of me."

" There is my box of jewels," says miss, looking eagerly at Harringay, who smiled and nodded and clapped his hand to a pocket.

" 'Tis safe," said he. " You may trust me for that, sweetheart." At which she smiled on him adoringly.

The man in black had sunk back into his seat, and his heavy breathing sounded presently in my ear, so that I concluded he, too, was fallen asleep. I was like to have done the same, for the jolting and the stuffiness of the air had wearied me ; but at that moment the coach came to a stop, and there was the

voice of the coachman calling out that this was Rake.

'Twas now darkling overhead, but the snow had ceased, and we entered the Flying Bull to refresh ourselves—a long barn of a place, with a surly landlord that had not sense enough to serve his customers properly. But the wine was fair, and I ordered a bottle or two, in the which I asked the old gentleman to join me.

Says he, "With all my heart, sir, seeing that you add this to my other obligations."

"What be those?" said I.

He gave me a bow, for he was a civil gentleman, though of a rustic habit. "You protect us, sir," he said. "We are relying upon your good weapons and bright courage in the face of emergency."

I laughed. "Oh, as for that," I said, "I can promise you there's none likely to infest you. You are as safe as in Whitehall within these fields of white."

"That is well said," remarked the man in black. "And I shall eat, for my part, with the better assurance after that promise."

He had certain sourness of voice, at which, however, I could not take offence, for there was nothing in his words to warrant it. But Harringay must be popping into the conversation, and so I turned my spleen on him.

"I would not promise," said he, "that we shall not be molested. There is plenty of cut-throats about, as I have heard."

"Lord, Harringay!" says the old lady, dropping her knife and fork, "you terrify me. What possessed us to come on this journey?"

He simpered, as one pleased with his effort, adding, "'Tis known as the worst road out of London."

"Dear heart!" cries the lady, and I saw miss whitening under the bloom she had took of the cold air.

"'Tis a pity," said I, "that simpletons talk of what they know not. 'Tis the safest road in the kingdom."

"Oh," says he with an air, "I would not discompose anyone. 'Tis best you should keep up your spirits." And he drank of his wine, whistling gently, and as one who is superior to circumstance and the rest of the company.

If he had not been so grotesque an ape I would have said something more, but as it was I had not the heart to overwhelm him in miss's presence. So said I good-humouredly, "Well, call me when there is danger, and I will see if I can spy it out of two spectacles."

I gave miss a jorum of mulled wine, and I plied her mother, who would eat anything. Never did I see a woman with such an ap-

petite. But the old gentleman took little or nothing, and only sipped his glass, being clearly in an anxious state.

“I was promised we should lie at Petersfield to-night,” he said in a plaintive way, “for I have business in Portsmouth to-morrow:”

“Oh, you shall lie there safe and warm,” said I, “and madam and miss, too, in as snug blankets as any in the realm, or call me hangman.”

I got up and walked to the window. The black night stared back at me with ominous eyes. Thinks I to myself that we must be hauling out at once if my words were to come true ; for there was snow in the sky like lead. I turned about, and under the candles saw the man in black guttling his wine as if he were in a haste to feel its temper in his stomach. He had drunk one bottle and the better part of another. I called out to the innkeeper, bidding him ask if we were to stay there all night, for, if not, we had better be gone. And that seemed to affect the coachman, for in a little news was come that we were to start. The last I saw of the table was the figure of the man in black drinking his second bottle to the dregs.

No sooner were we set in the stage again than the storm began. The wind swept over

the heights and rained on us a deadly flurry of snow. It battered against the windows and penetrated even to the recesses of the interior. But we were warm with our wine, and I, for one, lay back with contentment, with one eye open on miss (who was conscious of my stare, and fidgeted under it), and t'other on nothingness. The old lady went off to sleep forthwith with the food she had taken, and trumpeted at times to the chagrin of her daughter. But what's a snore ? At least it interfered not with me, and presently miss had slipped from me, and I was at rest like any child. The coach rocked in my dreams, and then there was a cry, and presently after I opened my eyes with the feeling that the snow was on my temples.

'Twas not that, however, but the barrel of a pistol that the man in black held.

"Move," says he fiercely, "and you are a dead man!"

As soon as I was awake I guessed what it was, and so, never stirring a hand, said I,—

"That command concerns not my jaw, I conceive."

"'Twere best you kept your mouth closed," said he.

"Why," said I, "I perceive that my prognostications were all wrong, and that we be fallen indeed into the hands of a toby-man,

who will, I trust, prove as gallant as all his kidney."

"Silence!" says he, "and give me what you have."

"You have my pistols?" I asked politely.

"Yes," he replied triumphantly; and at that I knew he was a mere bungler, and no real gentleman of the road, for he was all a-tremble with his excitement.

"Well," said I, "there is but the matter of a small bag of guineas—"

"Hand it out," said he sharply.

"Look'ee," said I; "you promise me death do I move."

"I will find it myself," he said quickly.

But I was not for having his dirty fingers on me; so said I, with a heavy sigh, "If I must, I must." And I drew out a bag from my inner pocket.

"You have saved yourself," said he hoarsely; and, Lord! I knew again he was new to the game, for no born toby-man would have rested content with what I gave him, when there was two bags more of golden pictures safely stowed in my coat.

"Now that you have what you want," said I meekly, "maybe you will allow me to ask after my companions."

"You will understand," said he, "that I am here with four loaded pistols, with the which I will shoot any that moves."

"Oh, I accept my fate," I replied, as if desperately. "'Tis the young lady that I am thinking on."

He laughed harshly.

"You have cast sheep's eyes enough, my good man. I have her jewels."

"Damme, now," says I, "had the jewels been in my keeping I would not have let 'em go so cheaply. Is the young gentleman in his gore?"

"No," says he curtly.

"We have all been taken by surprise and robbed," says the voice of the old gentleman tremulously. "This man—"

"Silence!" said the man in black.

"Are you there, miss?" said I to the darkness.

A small voice says,—

"Yes"—very frightened.

"Keep up your heart," said I. "We are none of us hurt, and when once this awesome ruffian—"

"I command you to be silent," said he savagely.

"Come," said I, "let us have some liberty. You have took our goods; let us have our tongues left."

At that he said nothing, but there came an interruption. If you will believe me the old lady had slumbered through it all, and now

woke up at a jolt of the coach, and cried out,—

“ Thieves ! ”

“ Why, madam, you say right,” said I ; “ thieves it is, and as ferocious a toby-man as ever I remember.”

With that she fell to screaming, but the man in black clapped his pistol to her, and gave her a fright that paralysed her to silence.

“ Give me what you have,” says he.

“ I—I have nothing,” she stammered. “ There is no room on me to hide so much as a—”

“ Bah ! ” says he. “ If you will cease your clatter I will do you no harm.”

“ The gentleman has promised to do none of us harm,” said I, “ if we behave modestly. This coach shall not swim in blood, for the which we should fall to our prayers in thankfulness.”

Whether he perceived my ironic tone and was to resent it I know not ; but I would have been equal to him, the nincompoop. But as chance had it, just at that moment the coach came to with a crash that sent him flying against the window. He flourished his pistols wildly, and I thought the fool would have let one off. Only the door opened on the other side now, and the head of the coachman peered in. My man presents at him, shouting,—

“ Move, and you’re a dead man ! ”

“ What’s all this stir ? ” says the coachman in amazement. “ Are ye gone out of your wits ? ”

“ No,” says he. “ But you shall be gone out of yours if you stir, and do not as I wish.”

“ This gentleman,” says I in a mild voice, “ has robbed the coach ; and ‘tis only of his kindness that we get off with our lives.”

“ You shall cut one of the horses loose and let me have it,” said this ridiculous toby-man, “ or I will blow out your brains.”

“ You’re welcome to a horse,” grumbled the other, still in astonishment ; “ you’re welcome to ‘em all, if you can get anywhere from here.”

“ What is it you mean ? ” he demanded haughtily.

“ Why, we’re astray—we’re in a drift somewhere towards Liss—the Lord knows where,” says t’other.

“ Indeed,” says I imploringly, “ you will not venture your valuable life on such a night.”

But he uttered a savage oath, yet appeared perplexed.

“ Look you,” said I in another voice. “ If you take the horse you will reach nowhere from here, and you will leave five hapless mortal beings to starve of cold. Let ‘em get back to the road, and then take your nag.”

He was silent for a while, but this argument

seemed to appeal to him. "Very well," said he, "I consent. But if there be any sign of treachery I will not hesitate to shoot. Go back to your horses."

At this the coachman, no doubt well enough content to be let off at such a price, shut the door and departed, and presently the stage began to rumble on again, floundering on the hills towards Liss.

Now you may think how I was tickled at this muckworm trying his hand at the road. He was some attorney's clerk or maybe 'prentice, I could have sworn, and he was as fidgety as a cat, seeming not to know what to do, or whom to confront and bully. Moreover, my attitude had put him in a flurry, and the knowledge that we were astray had discomfited him. So he stands with his back at the door, saying nothing, but holding a barker in each fist. But I was not for letting him alone, and says I,—

"You done that very well. I would I had your composure, and I would have been his Majesty's Chief Justice by now, with the hanging of rogues for my business."

At that the old gentleman plucked up spirit enough to venture on a word.

"Alack," he said, "I fear that all those that follow a trade of violence must come by violence to their end." And sighed.

"That's the truth," said I, smacking my leg. "You have spoke truth if you die to-night."

"Silence!" cries this shoddy highwayman nervously.

"Your tongue wags, young man," says the fat old lady to me. "But it appears to me you did little in the defence you boasted of some time ago."

"I can't abide cold steel at my ears," said I. "Alas that I was born to encounter so redoubtable a captain!"

"You are a soldier," says she angrily, "and you see us robbed and put about like this."

"Why, I can endure any ordinary toby-man," said I. "But this fellow is the very devil. I think any man may be excused to surrender to so vehement an antagonist. His bark's his bite," says I.

"Harringay, my smelling-salts," says she petulantly.

"I—I have 'em not," stammers he.

"No," said I. "'Tis all along of this gentleman with the barkers. See you. Mr Harringay and I have had to yield up; and if one of Mr Harringay's spirit hath done so, why, I think it no shame myself. But indeed," I went on, struck with a comic idea, "we are neither of us in need of shame, for I believe this gentleman to be a notorious

gentleman of the road with a terrible reputation. Is't not so, sir ? " says I.

" You are at liberty to believe what you will," says he, but in a milder voice.

" I have heard of these gentlemen," I went on, " and from his description I would take oath this is not other than Galloping Dick, Dick Ryder, that is a terror on the highways. Is it so ? " says I again.

" What if I be ? " says he ; and I believe the huff was well pleased, as indeed he might be.

" There ! " said I triumphantly. " I guessed it. And, believe me, any man might be proud to submit to Dick Ryder from all I hear."

" Ay, I have heard of him, too," says the old gentleman. " But they say he is better than would appear, and merciful."

" Oh, never fear," said I. " This gentleman will prove merciful ere we are finished with him."

" I warn you to expect nothing from me," said he in a more complacent voice.

Just at that moment the coach began to roll along more smoothly and at a faster pace, and I judged that we were upon the road again, and that the coachman was whipping up. This same thought seems to occur to the fellow, for he opened the window

and shouted out to the man to stop, with a lot of horrid threats. So that presently the coach came to and the coachman appeared at the door, seeing his manœuvre had failed.

“What is it?” he said innocently.

“You must keep your bargain,” says the man in black. “We are on the road?”

“Such road as there is,” he grumbled.

“Well, cut me one of the horses out, or I will make a hole in you,” cries the fellow.

“Come,” says I, “we were getting on quite famously till now. ‘Tis a pity to end this pleasant party.”

But he gave me an oath and stepped out of the vehicle, at which I seized the young man, Herringay.

“Out with you,” said I, “and we will see this mischief to an end.”

We got out into the snow, which was still whirling in the air, and I watched the coachman extricate one of his nags. The toby-man (if I may so style him) stood with his legs apart, drawn up in his most dramatic posture, pistols in hand.

“You will not stir,” says he, “for full ten minutes after I am gone. If you do, I will come back and blow your brains out.”

This truculent fellow quite appalled the coachman, who busied himself with the gear, and presently has one of his horses out. This

t'other mounted in an awkward fashion, and turned to us.

“Remember,” says he in a warning voice, “I never forget or forgive.”

“Now,” whispered I to Harringay, “now is the chance to show your quality. You take him on the near side and I will on the off. Leg or arm will do. He will topple off on the least shove, the fool.”

“But—but,” he stammered, “he is armed.”

“Damme,” said I, furious to meet such cowardice, “are ye frightened of a pistol in the hands of a mumchance?” And with an oath I left him and flew at my quarry.

I had got half-way to him when he saw me coming and pointed a barker at me.

“Stop!” cries he.

“Stop be damned!” says I, and sprang at him.

The pistol went off and took my hat, singeing my forehead, which made me all the hotter. I seized him leg and neck, and swung him down into the snow, where he grabbled for another weapon.

“If you move,” said I, “I will crack your neck like a rotten stick, my brave toby-man. Quit, you worm, quit!” And I gave him my fist between the eyes, so that he lay still.

“Coachman,” said I, “you may take your horse and throw a lantern here.” And I

fumbled in the man's pockets for a pistol. "Now," said I, "we are on terms again." And I dragged him to his feet. Harringay came up now, and says he,—

"Let me help."

"Get you gone! I want none of you!" I said sharply. "Damme, miss will serve me better. She will wear the breeches properly." And I called out to her.

By that time the coachman had his lantern, and cast the light on the miserable sheepish object who scowled at us.

"Here's a pretty toby-man," said I, "a right gallant fellow that sheds lustre on the craft. Why, a child could manage him. See," says I, for miss was come up, looking very handsome and excited, in the snow. "Take ye this pistol, miss, and hold it to him. He will do you no harm—no more than a louse, and never could."

She hesitated a moment, and then, summoning up her courage, did as I bid, holding the barker in a gingerly fashion, the while I searched his pockets, taking out what he had took of us.

I had just completed my job when there was the sound of voices quite close, for the snow had dulled the tread of the horses of the party that approached. They were on us ere I knew, and one called out,—

“ What is this ? Is’t an accident ? ”

“ It is a little accident to a toby-man,” said I. “ A brave fellow that is come by misfortune all unknown to his mother.”

“ The devil ! ” says the voice. “ We are after one such. Let us see him.”

Now you conceive how I felt, for that this was a party of traps on my heels I guessed at once. So I moved a little into the shadow of the lantern, and waited while the man examined t’other.

“ I do not know if this is our man,” says he, “ but ‘tis enough if he be guilty.”

“ Who is your man ? ” asked I, emboldened by this ignorance.

“ ‘Tis Dick Ryder,” says he ; “ we tracked him as far as Liphook, but the one that could speak to him has been detained by a fall at the village.”

“ Why, this is he ! ” said I in triumph. “ Did he not confess to being Ryder ? ” I asked of the others, for by this the old gentleman and his lady were both with us.

“ Certainly. I will swear to it,” says the old fellow. “ I heard him with these ears say he was Ryder.”

“ Then is our business done,” says the trap, “ and I’m not sorry, considering the night.” And his men surrounded my man and seized him. His face was as pale as the snow, and

he had a horrid, frightened look. Maybe he was some attorney's clerk that had robbed his master, and was in flight. I cared not, and I never knew ; and he went off silent with his captors on the way to the Triple Beam, which he deserved for a bungling, bragging nincompoop.

But now we were alone, and the guineas and the jewels were in my pockets. Lord, I love the jingle of 'em, and so I took my counsel forthwith.

“Sir,” says I to the old gentleman, “here be your purse and your papers ; and to you, sir,” says I to Harringay, “I restore the smelling-salts, that is your charge. Miss, this, I'll warrant, is your jewels, the which I would advise you to place in a better security than heretofore. And now justice is done, and we conclude with a merry evening.”

“But there is my purse !” says Harringay, in an amaze. “My purse with fifty guineas.”

“Why, your purse must be where your heart is, in your boots,” says I contemptuously, and called to the coachman.

“Give me that nag,” says I.

And before he understood I was on the beast, and, doffing to miss and her mother, rode off into the snowy night with a peal of laughter.

THE LADY IN THE COACH

IT was not until I was three parts across the heath upon the adventure that I had gotten any suspicion I was forestalled. The night was very thick, owing to a pack of clouds that lay furled upon the moon, and till then was as still as a mouse. But Calypso's hoofs started a wether bleating near by, and it ran jumping into the distance, with its silly bell a-tinkling round its neck. And just upon that the noise of a commotion far off came down to me, and, pulling up the mare, I set my ears to the valley. I knew the coach must be wobbling along two miles this side of Belbury, and I reckoned to meet it by the fork. But this news, as you may conjecture, put me in a taking. There was none along that road save me and Creech's lot, and 'twas gall to me to play jackal to Dan, or to anyone else for the matter of that ; so, putting my boots into Calypso, I rode down the valley at a gallop, but I had gone no farther than a few hundred paces when a clatter of nags came up the road to my left, and I stopped the roan dead. I was not to be taken like a fool, all

agape with chagrin, and I held up under the cover of a tall furze bush, till all four were by, passing like shadows into the night.

“ Damn Creech ! ” I says to myself, for I had scarce a crown to my pocket. But seeing that vexation would not serve me, I rode on, mighty discomfited, and presently entered the high road near the foot of the heath. Right afore me, and wrapt in the shadows of a black clump of trees, was the hulk of the stage, out of which proceeded a clamour of excited voices. When I came up with it the coachman was gathering his reins for a start, but at sight of me rising out of the darkness he dropped 'em again.

“ Save us ! ” he cried, with an oath, “ here's more of the gentry,” and stared at me very sullen.

At this exclamation an instant silence fell inside the coach, and then a head was poked cautiously through the window.

“ 'Tis useless, my good man,” said a thin, high voice. “ We are by this plucked to our bare bones, and sit grinning in them.”

“ Heaven save us from this accursed heath ! I feared 'twould be so,” says someone else, with a whine.

“ Faith,” says I, coming to a stop alongside, “ 'tis an honour you put upon me. I have been mistaken afore now for his Highness,

and for Jack Ketch too, but 'tis the first time I was dubbed gentleman of the highway."

The old fellow at the window rolled his eyes over me without a word, and pretty sharp eyes they were.

"And who may you be, then ?" says he, with a queer smile upon his lean face.

"Why, if it comes to that," says I in turn, "who the devil may you be ?"

He scrutinised me closely, and then, "Coachman," he called, "bestir your horses."

"Come, come," says I, for the old scarecrow tickled my curiosity, "there's no need to quarrel upon our characters. You have had the highwaymen here ?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Four dirty rascals," he said ; "and we're in no humour for another."

"Look 'ee," says I sharply, "I allow no one to repeat a mistake."

He surveyed me with indifference, smiled, and withdrew his head. "In that case," he said bluntly, "'tis ill to waste your time and ours."

He was a surly old cock, and, but that I knew Dan must have skinned him close, I would have dragged him forth and served him according to his deserts ; and, in truth, I was half in the mind to despoil him of some of his fine fig, but just then another voice broke in.

"Sir," says this noodle, "if you be an officer, as I should judge by your dress, I pray you will despatch these villains. I am a poor man and can ill afford to lose my purse, but if a small reward will serve—"

"Ha, ha!" says I, nodding, "here is some sense at last," and, drawing the roan nearer, I looked into the coach.

There was six of 'em, all looking pretty sheepish; and one, as I discerned in the dim light, was a lady.

"Lord!" says I, "five of you, and the coachman to be frightened by four scurvy cut-throats!"

"Why, sir," says the man that had just spoke, who wore a heavy paunch, "an you had been here I warrant you could ha' done nothing. The ruffians wore black masks and swore abominably. For my part, all I can say is that there was the cracking of whips and a pistol through each window ere I was out of the lady's lap, where, being asleep, the jolt had thrown me."

"The exchange was effected, I assure you," put in the old man suavely, "with less noise than if it had been a Sabbath sermon, save for the protestations of my friends here."

"Protestations!" says the lady, breaking her silence, and in an voice rough with anger. "There were tears enough to have touched a

heart of stone, and less resistance than a barndoar fowl's. A fine company for escort, forsooth ! ”

I shot another look at her—for a woman, specially if she be beautiful, tickles my fancy—and, sure enough, I could perceive even in that light she wore an air of quality. But I put her aside a moment, and says I to the man with the paunch : “ What have you lost ? ” says I.

“ Sir,” says he, “ I am a goldsmith, the which trade hath in these days sunk so low that—”

But here Belinda intervened on him very sharp. “ For heaven's sake,” says she impatiently, “ spare us the repetition of your circumstances ; and since,” she added with a sneer, “ this gentleman is so good as to promise you assistance, specify your guineas and be done.”

“ There were a hundred guineas in my bag,” said the goldsmith humbly.

But at that, and it may be because of the hint in the lady's words about me, there came another voice from t'other side.

“ I am a merchant, sir,” it began.

“ Perhaps,” says I, with a glance at the lady, “ we had better spare that also.”

“ Sir,” says the cully, accepting my rebuke, “ if you will but save me my two hundred and

fifty guineas you will place me deeply in your debt. A King's officer, like yourself, should have no difficulty in running these rascals to earth."

That made me smile, as you may fancy ; and then, turning to Hoity-toity, I says, " And how have you fared, madam ? "

Now that I regarded her more closely, I could perceive that she was very elegant, but she wore an ill-tempered frown, that set her beauty askew.

" I," says she, shrilly, " am in no mood to indulge a wayside curiosity—unless, indeed, 'tis your business to catch robbers." I bowed very solemn, and she eyed me with asperity. " I have been rifled of many valuable jewels, which I should now possess had I kept other company than that of chicken-hearts."

" 'Tis a fool's trick to carry jewels on the King's highway," says I. " These gentlemen of the road snap their fingers at his Majesty."

" And you a King's officer to say that ! " she said scornfully.

" Faith," said I, with a laugh, " I make no such claim to dignity. I am a poor civil gentleman, of no more pretensions than your brave companions."

" Brave ! " she echoed, with disdain. " Five able-bodied men, and never a blow among them ! "

"Pardon me, madam," interposed the old gentleman softly ; "I have already explained that you must not reckon with me, having these five years no certain knowledge if my legs be still my own."

At this point the coachman broke in with a gruff voice. "We must be going," says he, "or maybe we shall have further trouble ere Belbury."

"Heavens ! would they flay us ?" asked the old gentleman, lifting his eyebrows. "I assure you, I have nothing beyond my skin and two very incompetent legs."

That set me laughing, for the old cock tickled me.

"Faith," says I, "here is a philosopher."

Whereupon, like a pistol-shot, madam turns upon me in a fury. "And who are you, sir, that dares mock at our misfortunes ?" she cried angrily. "Who are you, that comes swelling with fine feathers and a cock-a-doodle-doo about assistance ? Oh, were there stuff enough within the four walls of this carriage, some one should fetch you a clout for your impertinence ! I was a fool to have ventured in this company—a fool not to have taken my Lord Kerslake's offer of a seat."

The old gentleman looked amused, and glanced whimsically at me ; but, sure, I liked her spirit, though I made answer mockingly.

"Faith, gentlemen," says I, "you have here spirit enough to arm a regiment. I crave your ladyship's pardon ; I am of a round and jocund temper, and can scarce keep my teeth inside my lips ; I should grin upon a tomb-stone. But as for your misfortunes, rot me, but they touch me nearly ; and, had the opportunity fallen, I should ha' been proud to draw a skewer for you."

"You have fine words, sir," says she, still very angry. "I am weary of words ; I have heard brave words enough to outlast my years. You brag of your sword ! " (she puffed her nostrils in a sneer), "had you arrived five minutes sooner, the chance had been yours to show the spirit under your fine coat. I am weary of words. Drive on, a God's name, coachman ! "

I glanced about the coach with a smile—though, to say the truth, the wench's tongue nettled me ; and "It seems," says I, "that we are a pack of superfluous cravens. Why is there none to fight us ? My stomach, I vow, heaves for a highwayman. How stand yours, sirs ? "

"Mine, sir, is sinking," says the old gentleman caustically—"sinking for the meal from which you detain us."

"Pray begone, sir ! " added Hoity-toity. "As we may not have your valiant aid, no

doubt your comfortable bed will provide you bloodless dreams of battle."

There was no limit to the jade's tongue ; but I kept myself in control, and merely laughed.

"Why," says I, "it seems I come to the table when the wine is cleared."

"By five minutes," she exclaimed—"by bare five minutes ! The hoofs of their horses were not round the corner ere yours was poking its nose through the window."

"I would I had forestalled 'em," says I, with meaning.

The lady paid me no heed, but continued, "I have come from a town where young gentlemen of blood blink not at danger, and to lose five minutes were not to lose the privilege of protecting a lady of birth."

Her sneers made me mad ; but "Ha !" says I, "your ladyship lives in a brave town. And what would these young gentlemen do ? Sink me, I am so humble that I must go to school under them."

"They would not hang to gossip upon the wheels of a coach ; and I should have my jewels within four-and-twenty hours," says she curtly.

"Gad," says I, "they are gallant young gentlemen indeed, and of a rare devotion to your ladyship. As for me—"

“As for you, sir,” interrupted the old gentleman, testily, “if you will be good enough to resume your journey, we may have some chance at least of our dinner.”

Hereupon the coachman cracked his whip, and the horses plunged forward a step; but I leaned over and laid my hand upon the side.

“Fie, fie!” says I, “to mumble of dinner when the lady’s jewels are in question, and but four-and-twenty hours to get ‘em!”

“The more reason for your leaving at once,” said the old mawkin, sarcastically.

Somehow the behaviour of these two nettled me. I could see that the one entertained suspicions of me, and t’other used me with so small an amount of ceremony that I was loth to leave ‘em ere I had cried quits with ‘em. But it was the ejaculation of the goldsmith as set the idea suddenly in my head, for, says he, in astonishment, taking up the old gentleman’s phrase, “You will undertake the quest, sir?” And immediately the thought of a pretty whimsy flared in my head; but ere ever I had taken it, up springs the merchant crying, “Mine too—mine also, sir; I pray you, young gentleman, my bag of guineas!”

“The devil!” says I, very calm, and as if I had made my resolve long since. “How would those same young gentlemen of blood

entreat you, I wonder ? 'Slife, I have a notion that they would despatch you all to hell, for your common quality, it being of untoward audacity for to seat you next her ladyship." And then, putting my head right through the window, I says, addressing the lady in the most pretentious, solemn manner, " Your ladyship," I says, " frame me in your fancy, however high the flight, as one of these gentlemen of blood. Sirs, bear your misfortune with patience, I adjure you. Lard and oddsbobs, I wish you a more prosperous journey." And, with a sweeping bow, I spurred the roan into a gallop down the road.

When I pulled up at the foot of the heath, I could hear the creaking of the coach as it lumbered in the distance ; then, turning the mare's nose to the common, I put her to an easy canter. 'Twas a design of some humour that possessed me ; and what further drove me on was the reflection that I had a bare lining to my pockets, and, if I could not come by a high-toby lay, well, I would juggle with Creech for a venture. I knew Dan's haunts well enough, and that as like as not he was hiding in The Woodman for to celebrate his success. And, sure enough, when I had crossed the heath and struck into the pine wood on the further slopes, after concealing Calypso in a thicket, there was old Kettle

met me at the door of his inn, very suspicious, but of a mighty cheerful countenance. He was acquainted with me by sight, for he let me pass with a nod ; and, proceeding to the rear of the hostelry, I found one of Dan's lads stuck before the door of the barn. He challenged me as I approached ; but " Pooh, Tom ! " says I, " keep your lead against traps and such vermin," the which made him grin upon recognising my voice.

" What brings you here, Dick Ryder ? " says he. " We thought you was in London."

" I'm on the King's service, I am, Tom," says I.

Whereat he broke into a loud guffaw, and says he, " You'd best forswear, then, or Dan'll crack no bottle for you to-night. He's in a rare humour, is Dan."

But I pushed by him, and entered the barn, where Creech and two more of his rogues were sprawling upon the floor, pretty far gone in liquor, as I conceived. At the sight of me, up jumps Dan to his feet, but falls back again drunkenly.

" You damned pink-faced truant, Dick Ryder ! " he cried, " what do you out of your bed at this hour ? And Mistress Polly all forlorn ! "

" Women," says I, " are devilish seductive for ornament, Dan, but theirs is a heavy price,

and I'm quit of 'em." And with that, nodding at a crate of bottles, I added, "A fetch of luck, eh, Danny ? "

"Sit down, my fine feathered bird," says Creech ; "sit down and tipple along of us. Stab me if I keep my luck to myself ! I'm a generous hand, I am."

The wine was none so bad, being sack of an elegant body, though Creech had never the palate of a fly ; and presently, after I had drunken, I looked about me, but could see nothing of the booty. "Ah !" says I, "I'll warrant you have filled your purse, Danny. You're no company for a poor wastrel like me."

Creech grinned, and winked a bloodshot eye on me. "You should ha' joined the company, Dick," he said. "But, damme, you're so devilish shy. Plague take you, haven't I given you your chances ? Stab me, you fine young bantam, for all your pride I wager you've not a crown in your pockets, and ours a-bulging out with goldfinches."

"One, Danny—one," says I, "and a good well-thumbed crown, come by honestly."

"Bah !" says Creech, with a sneer ; "you'd be dragging your pockets along the ground if you'd been along of us to-night."

"Did you take a coach ?" says I.

"A coach !" replied Creech. "Such a

coach as you never saw—just guineas a-dropping off the box into your mouth, and none to deny you. Eight hundred and thirty golden pictures, you young fool, all stamped of his Majesty ; and more to that.”

“ More ? ” says I, very innocent.

“ And it mightn’t be a little box, Dick—only a little box,” says Creech, in a wheedling voice ; “ but a queen’s ransom to its belly ; ” and without more ado, but as if anxious to strut upon his dungheap, he put his hands between his legs, and fetching out a casket, threw it at me. “ Catch it,” he cried ; “ open it and feast your eyes upon it. There’s glamour enough there to turn a stomach sour.”

’Twas a rare lot of jewels, for sure, and it was small wonder that her ladyship was in such a taking. But Creech, in the exultation of drink and success, could not hold his tongue, which it was not my desire that he should. “ Where’s your damned independence now ? ” he chuckled. “ What sort of figure upon the lay does Galloping Dick cut atween here and London ? ”

But if I was to have it forth of his fingers I would have it openly, and so I says plumply, “ I have a fancy for that box, Dan,” says I.

Creech leaned over, and set his dirty finger against his nose, poking out his tongue.

“ Yes,” says I, in a careless fashion ; “ I have taken a main liking to it. I want that, Dan.”

Creech burst into a fit of laughing.

“ Hear him ! ” he cried. “ Hearken at the avaricious young fellow. He wants it, the precious boy ! And so he does. And will his nursey give him the pretty things for a plaything till he falls asleep ? Oh, Dicky, Dicky, stab me but you’ll be my death of bursting ! ” And he rolled upon the ground in merriment that came in good part of the sack.

“ Come, Dan,” says I, as pleasant as you like ; “ you won’t deny me, old friend—not you. Let us shake hands on it.”

But this set Creech yelling with laughter. “ Why, curse me,” said he, “ here’s a queer game, hearties ! Here’s a poor young man with but a crown to his pocket, and a soul a-soaring in the sky ! ”

But then, without further ado, I whipped the coin out of my pocket and spun it in the air. “ Come, Danny,” says I, affably ; “ I will toss against you, with the precious gems for stakes. Put ‘em down atween us, and by God I’ll nick ‘em.”

Creech stopped in his laughing and set the box in front of him, piling upon it two heavy pistols and a naked sword. “ There, Dick

Ryder," says he, grinning, " come and fetch 'em. There's none as can charge meanness upon me. Take 'em, cocky ; stab me, Dick Ryder, where's your grit ? " and over he rolls upon his side, shrieking with laughter, in which t'others joined him.

Now he had, as it were, laid the job fairly before me, and for the moment I was in the mind to take him at his word ; but the next second I had abandoned the purpose, for though I had little doubt that I could manage the three with them in a drunken condition, I was not for spilling blood, at anyrate at that stage. So what does I do but merely stick forth my foot and kick the weapons into the air. That fetched Creech to his legs mighty sudden, and scowling at me he says, " Is this serious, Dick ? "

" You'd best guard 'em well," says I, " for I mean ill by them."

" Look 'ee, Dick," said Creech slowly, " if you want 'em you can take 'em. D'ye see ? I'm not a man to botch my words. Curse me, I've given you your chances afore now."

" Well," says I, " I'll fight you for 'em."

Creech winked. " I ain't afeard of your toasting-fork," he said, " though you are used to wear it for a taunt. I have as many bloody facts to my tally as, maybe, Dick Ryder himself. But I'm no precious baby, to risk my

skin in behalf of what's my own. An you take 'em, you shall reckon with the gang."

"Damme," says I, "gang or no, 'tis all one with me. I'll have 'em within a round of the clock."

"No, no, young fellow," replied Creech, with a sly look. "'Tisn't upon our side as the whole bargain must lie. Strike me a proper balance. Curse me, if you're for sport, I'll meet you. Put up that crown. D'ye think I'm to cast away the baubles on the fall of a shield? Place me something fat in the scales."

"Why, my sword," says I, with a laugh. Creech grunted.

"Calypso," says I.

"Bah!" says he; "mare and sword and all, yourself atop, my young blood."

"Would you buy blood for money?" I asked.

"Faith, yes," he answered; "'tis the fashion of the trade. And you're a pretty hand with the irons. Look at you—you with your fine fancy dress, for all the world like a gentleman in his Majesty's service. Stout muscles, Dick, but small wits behind 'em. What say you? You shall have the trinkets, and the guineas too if you can get 'em. But an you fail we'll have you, by hell, body and soul for twelve months."

I knew 'twas his inflation that drew him on thus, but it served my purpose ; and so, after a pause, I said, " How long do you give me for the job ? "

" Till this hour to-morrow night," says Dan, seeming to consider.

Thereupon I jumped to my feet. " I'll take you," says I ; " and now for another glass."

Creech stares at me for a moment in stupid wonder, and then solemnly reached out his hand, which I took. Filling a glass, I nodded at the three and gave them a toast. " Here's success to me, lads ! " I says.

But at that Creech turned black, and spilling the wine he was drinking, looked at me savagely. " Damn you ! " he said, " keep your toasts to yourself, and get you gone, or Tom out there will have leave to thrid you with bullets."

But having made my point I was in no humour to be offended at the surly hunks, and so I tossed off the wine very leisurely. " Good Danny," I said ; " there's sense in your tipsy brain yet. Best go to bed and nurse it, for you'll need all your wits to-night."

But Creech, who had now fallen into a dark mood, made no answer, merely muttering to himself ; and with a nod I was gone. But, Lord, the adventure was ready to my hands,

for to cheat three such clumsy sots was no difficult task for me. I scarce gave it a thought until, coming upon Tom in the yard afore the barn, a sudden notion took my fancy, and I came to a stop beside him.

"Ah, Tom," says I, shaking my head, "'tis a raw night for to gnaw the vitals out of a hedgehog, and you with no drink. I've a mind to spare you."

"What d'ye mean?" says he, without a suspicion.

"When is your time up?" I asked, paying him no heed.

"At midnight," says he, cursing a little to himself.

"Tom," says I, "you're a friendly fellow, you are, and I have taken a compassion on a poor devil as can neither eat nor drink his belly full." And with that, and ere he was aware, I had my hands upon his throat. The sudden action took him by surprise, and though he struggled I forced him presently upon his knees. "Why," says I, pleasantly, "sure, I told you I was upon the King's service, Tom, engaged by his sacred Majesty for to get rid of rascals like yourself." But then, getting his breath, he opened his mouth to cry for help, only on the instant I slipped a splinter of wood atween his teeth. So there was he soon, bitted and bound safe enough.

Now these transactions fell, and with little noise, in the shadow of the barn, where it ran forth to the margin of the wood ; and no sooner was Tom secured than there was the noise of someone opening the door, and Creech's footsteps sounded in the yard. In an instant I slipped Tom's cloak about me, and, all muffled to my nose, withdrew a pace into the darkness, at the same time letting the point of my sword fall on the cully's chest. I reckon that he knew well enough what was enjoined on him, for he never stirred ; but I was a little anxious about Creech, lest, even in his state, he should recognise my voice. He stopped at the corner and called Tom in a loud voice, to the which I made a surly reply.

“ Cold, eh ? ” says he, with a chuckle, “ and sulky ? Well, if 'twill warm you, you'd best put a bullet through Galloping Dick. D'ye hear ? We have a little game atween us, and if he gets by you ye shall answer for it.”

I durst trust myself to nothing but a mumble by way of answer, but it suited Creech, who swaggered off to the barn again ; and then, getting Tom in my arms, I dragged the body into a coppice, and presently resumed my post as sentinel. 'Twas a shrewd night, and the hours passed very slowly ; but there was that in my heart to warm me against

the cold, for I knew that all hung upon the change at midnight. And when that time came, and there was once more the sound of feet in the yard, I drew up stiff and stark, being solicitous for the hazard. 'Twas Blake that came to relieve me, but, as fortune had it, his head was mazed with sleep and drink, and he paid me little attention. I growled out an oath or two, to which he gave no answer, his teeth chattering in his jaws ; and with that I left him, and rounding the corner I made straight for the entry. When I got in, there was Ned lying in a heap upon some straw, snoring like a swine, and Creech, as I perceived, seated with his back against the wall, and his eyes lifted meditatively to the rafters.

" That you, Tom ? " says he, and without even a glance at me, chucked his thumb towards a pile of bottles.

" There's no sleep yet in that voice," thinks I ; and, seating myself in a dark corner, where the lanthorn shed no light, I helped myself to wine. 'Twas grateful enough to a pinched stomach, but when I was done, and stretched snugly in the straw, there was I, destined to wait upon Creech's convenience, till so be as it pleased him to fall off. He had by this, as I could see, shook off the most of his liquor, being, I fancy, in no wise comfortable as to the bargain he had struck with me. But that

did not disturb me, for I could bide my time ; only it gave me a start, I confess, when, after half an hour in this fashion, he got upon his feet and came towards me. I had all along been feigning slumber, and as he came I managed to bury my head deeper in my cloak, lest he should take a suspicion of my phiz. He stood over a moment, and then, "Drunk," says he, and fitting his foot into the small of my back, shoved me a pace forward. I rolled a little more upon my face, and gave a grunt, like one stirred in a deep sleep ; and then I knew 'twas all right, for Creech's jaws cracked in a yawn, and, retiring to his corner, he flung himself down. From where I lay, and by the faint light of the lanthorn, I could perceive him turning the casket over in his fingers, and presently he popped it in the straw beneath him, and, laying his head upon it, disposed himself for the night.

To this point the affair had gone very well, but I must now wait until Dan was nodding, and a little more than that too. So the better part of two hours elapsed before I made a movement. Then, pulling myself cautiously into a sitting posture, I listened. The barn reverberated with the noise the two cullies made ; there was little doubt about Creech this time. I rose, still as a spectre. The light flickered upon Dan's body ; and very

slowly I drew near. I warrant there was never a mouse so quiet as me as I bended over him, with my fingers in the straw. Pah ! the job was easy enough done, for all it was so furtive. For, the box proving hard to his neck, his head had slipped away, and there was no need to disturb him in extracting it ; and, more by token, when I had inserted my fingers, they came upon a bag of goldfinches too, the which, as I recalled, was in our pact. And so with exceeding wariness I fetched both of 'em out, and only a quiver upon Dan's features to mark for it. That accomplished, I tripped it to the door, which I unlatched gently. Now all was going well enough, and I should have had the booty without more ado than a sharp time in the frost ; only who should intervene, unexpected, but the fat sneak Kettle, upon whom, prowling round the barn after some dirty business of his own, I stumbled over the threshold. The shock sent me back against the door, which fell to with a loud bang, and what with that and with the alarm Kettle made, Creech and the others were upon their feet and wide awake in a moment. Knocking the innkeeper aside, with a curse on him for his interference, I slipped forth of the yard and made forthright for the wood. But Creech was sharp enough too. He bellowed with rage, and came roar-

ing upon me with his pair of rascals at his heels. There was little enough to spare between us, though the dark was on my side. But then again 'twas the dark that made against me too ; for, mistaking my direction, I ran into the forest upon the side away from Calypso, and shortly found myself in a wilderness of coppice, scarce able to move a yard for the undergrowth about me. Creech was not far off, for I could hear him breaking through the wood and yelling at the top of his voice. I reckon there was never a cully in such a taking afore.

But I was not yet quit of 'em—not by any means ; for here was I, uncertain of my position, and wanting a nag to carry me safe out of their hands. And the worser part of it was, that Creech was pretty sure to happen upon the mare in his wanderings. Still there was nothing further to be done at this juncture for the noise of my advance would be heard, and so I lay very still in the brake for upwards of an hour. By that time the night was yielding, and the dawn came up in a thin white mist, that stretched like a counterpane upon the forest. Overhead heavy-bellied clouds were labouring in clumsy flight towards the west. I knew Creech would not have given up ; but 'twas foolish to remain longer in concealment, and so very circumspectly I

crept through the wood towards t'other face of the barn, where, I guessed, Calypso was tethered.

Calypso was there, sure enough, but so was someone else ; and had it not been that I proceeded with such stealth, he must have overheard the sounds of my progress. Creech knew me too well to suppose I would have left the roan to him, and there he sat upon his haunches, just afore me in the bracken, with his eyes on the nag. Not a twig stirred as I approached, and my steps fell noiselessly upon the grass, for here the forest was more open. And thus I came within spring of Dan, when drawing a pistol, I suddenly walked out of the bushes with the most unconcerned air you can imagine. Creech turned sharply, but the nozzle of my barker was at his forehead.

“ Ah, Danny, Danny ! ” says I, “ you would not rob a poor young fellow of his mare ! ”

Creech turned white with rage, and swore horribly.

“ Hush, Danny, hush ! ” says I. “ Think on your immortal soul, Danny, and forego wicked words—also,” says I, “ those ugly weapons, being the instruments of an evil life.”

Dan said nothing, but I meant to take his fangs out, and so brought him to sharply with the pistol.

"Drop 'em!" says I briskly; and with another furious oath Creech threw his barkers to the ground. After that I had gathered them up, says I again, very cheerful, "And now, Danny," I says, "'tis time for an innocent young fellow like me to be getting home to his mammie; which being so, with your kind help, faith, I will e'en venture to mount the nag, me and my treasure," and I slapped the box underneath my coat.

Creech was livid, and his eyes glared on me full of the devil; but I kept him under with the pistol, and drove him, sullen, up to Calypso. Vaulting into the saddle, I turned and took off my hat to him, with a mocking tongue; but in that instant, whenas my back was towards him, Dan had skipped into the thicket, and now I heard him scrambling through the bushes, yelling and whistling as he went. I was not afraid of him or his creatures, but I did not design to be caught, and so set Calypso's heels to work. But just as I did so there came up a clatter of hoofs from the yard near by, and I knew that Creech was upon my track. Calypso flew forward like a swallow, and at the same moment the noise of a pistol spread echoes abroad, and a bullet snipped a corner from my hat. That was my signal to be gone. "Come, my girl," says I; and the roan,

leaping to the rowels, sped down the narrow pathway in a gallop.

The track was as lean as a gutter, and sloped very sharply ; the bushes, too, pressed hard upon it, and 'twas not the least of my hazards to come down that descent at a breakneck speed. But I knew well enough that the pursuit would be instant, and that Creech was in too black a rage to pick his footsteps. So I kept the nag to her pace, and on she rushed, floundering from side to side, swaying against the bushes, and slithering over the smooth rocks. I held her up with the reins, and more than once saved her from coming down upon her prats ; and once she took me sudden under the overhanging bough of a tree, which fell so low that the sight of it set me a-blinking. But or ever I was past my doubts we were through, and the mare was clattering for the high road. Not until we reached this did I pull in, and twist about in my saddle to inspect what was forward. Creech and his men were not yet forth of the wood, but I could hear 'em pounding away down the path, and guessed that they were none so far away. But for that I cared not a groat, for Calypso was staunch and fleet, and more than a match for any horse in the shires. So, pulling her round upon the Belbury road, I urged her into a gentle canter.

I reckon that they must ha' been amazed, when they were come to the highway, to see me no more than half a mile away, and jogging along as easy and unconcerned as you please. But that was in my device, for I had no animosity against such a braggart fool as Creech, and, as I have said, I was tickled by a pretty touch of humour. So on I cantered, and Creech and his two lads behind me, very much excited, as I conceive, by the prospect of overtaking me. That, however, was not my notion ; and no sooner were they drawn within shot than I put the spurs into Calypso and forged out of range again. This manœuvre I repeated several times, till their faces must ha' been yellow with chagrin. If they had entertained but a grain of reason about 'em, they might have seen as I was merely playing with 'em. And maybe they did ; but Creech had no stomach for defeat, and, being now a veritable cauldron of passions, stuck as close to me as he might. And thus we galloped, the four of us, at length into Belbury.

Here I dropped into a canter, and coming to a halt afore a little inn in the main street, I flung out of the saddle and opened the stable yard. T'others were not yet round the corner, and so, tethering Calypso to a stake in the wall immediately below a window in

the upper floor, I bade the ostler give her a bite where she stood, and hurried into the hostelry. I was now, as you may conceive, possessed of a roaring appetite, and ordered breakfast forthwith to be served in the said upper room. And no sooner was I got there and set comfortable upon a seat, than the three horses came thundering down the road and drew up with a plunge before the doorway. I laughed at that, for I knew they were too drunken with rage to think straightly ; and I had half a mind to invite Danny to breakfast. Sink me, but the ninnies thought that they had nicked me ! For presently after, up comes the innkeeper with the breakfast, but bearing a message for me, from " three gentlemen below, as, saving my presence, would be glad for to breakfast in my company."

Lord, how it set me laughing ! " Why," says I, " if they be honest folk, Benjamin, by all means."

" They have ridden hard," says he, hesitating.

" Why, so have I," I answered ; and then, but still with reluctance, he was departing, when I suddenly fetched him back. " Has the coach been long gone ? " says I ; for though 'twas early I knew the next stage was long.

“ ‘Tis gone half an hour,” says he.

“ That is well,” I thinks to myself, and, dismissing him with a nod, I threw open the window and looked down into the yard. There was Calypso, ready bridled, and munching her oats beneath me. That too contented me, and I sat down and handled my knife. It was a little time afore any feet ascended the stairs, and then at last the handle turned and in tramped Creech, all alone, with a look of triumph fastened on his ugly face. It was clear they had had some parley outside, and he was set to beard me. I rose to my feet, and making him a deep bow, waved my fingers at a chair.

“ Pray you, sit down,” said I, very ceremonious ; “ I takes it kindly of you, Danny, to come for to cheer up an old friend like this. ‘Tis poor fare to a nobleman such as you, but suitable enough for a humble man like me.”

Creech scowled, for he had not looked for me to talk in this fashion, I warrant.

“ You’re game is up, my precious cully,” he said savagely, “ and you’d best put a pleasant phiz on you and give in.”

I glanced at the clock. “ I think not, Danny,” I says softly ; “ there is some mistake, sure. There’s ten more hours to run—a pleasant little holiday for all three. And, by the way, where are my friends Ned

and Blake ? I don't see their handsome faces."

Creech grinned in a sour way. " You'll make their acquaintance soon enough," says he.

" Oh ! waiting outside, eh ? " says I. " Bashful, eh ? "

" Yes," says Creech, showing his teeth. " Just waiting outside on your convenience, Captain ; just a-waiting for to help your honour into the saddle."

" You overload me with favours, Danny," says I, going on with my breakfast undisturbed.

But Creech's temper was too constrained to carry the jest further, and he broke out harshly,—

" Hark 'ee, Dick ; why the hell d'ye pull such a long face over the job ? What does this play-acting do ? Bah ! Out with the casket, and we'll split a bottle on it."

Forthwith I put my hand under my coat, and fetching out the casket set it on the table afore me. Upon that I placed the bag of guineas, and atop of all a brace of pistols."

" Come and take 'em," says I, mimicking Creech's own words to me. " Come and take 'em, Danny. Here they are.—Rip me, Danny, where's your grit ? "

He swore abominably, and made a step to

me ; but slipping my fingers over a barker, I cocked it. Dan drew back and gazed doubtfully at the door. I knew what was passing in his mind, and how he was meaning to set the other tykes on me ; but I said nothing, merely replacing the baubles in my pocket. This distracted Creech again, and he yelled,—

“ Give 'em up, you young hell-hound ! ”

I laughed, and at the laugh Creech's temper snapped, and he flung himself upon me. He was no coward Creech, though mighty judicious out of his rage. But his leap availed him little now, for plump goes my pistol on his skull, and down he comes to the floor. I walked to the window.

“ Good-bye, Dan,” I said.

Creech, scrambling to his feet, with his eyes agog, made as though to follow me, and then sprang at the door, screaming to his men. But I was already out of the window ere he had reached the stairs, and dropping silently upon Calypso, cast her free. Another instant more, and, the gates of the yard opening, Calypso shot past the inn, and, gathering her knees under her belly, was sweeping out of Belbury at a gallop.

I was already a quarter of a mile away, when glancing behind, I saw them making a start, for they were in no wise prepared for my diversion, and were thrown into confusion

thereby. But now they came abreast for me at their hardest, for all of which the roan held her own without any difficulty. In this way the chase sped into the open plain beyond Belbury, Creech clinging like a leech, as I knew he would, to the smell of the gold. Half-way across the moor I stopped and listened. There, for sure, was what I wanted right ahead of me ; and so, clapping back my heels, I galloped over the rise afore me, and came down into the hollow, where the coach was rumbling along like a blowsy bluebottle. 'Twas rolling and lurching and pitching, like as if 'twas a cockle at sea, and I soon overtook it and hailed the driver. He looked at me suspiciously, but reined in his horses, and I pulled the mare across the window.

"Why," says a piping voice, that I recognised, "bless me ! here is our young gentleman again."

I gave the old mawkin a wink, and glanced round the company. There was Hoity-toity, as plump and proud as you please, leaning back against the cushions with her nose in the air.

"Your ladyship," says I, addressing her politely, "I trust that you have enjoyed your night's rest to the full."

"I am in tolerable health," says she shortly, but eyeing me in some wonder.

"Life, your ladyship," says I, very sententious, "is full of reverses, best forgot; and the most excellent intentions are fraught with the most woeful issues."

"Oh!" she broke in coldly, "if you are come to recount your failure, your time is ill spent. In truth, I had not remembered your face till this good gentleman spoke, and I had never a thought for your errand."

But if I was in any doubt about my business, it was that ungracious speech disposed of it; and, saying no more, I drew the casket from my pocket, and, bowing low to the saddle with a great air of ceremony, passed it to her.

"If I am remembered in your ladyship's sneers," I says, "I beg it shall be along of those young gentlemen of blood you talk of." But here I glanced along the road, and there was the noise of hoofs coming over the hill. "And I pray," said I, turning again to her, "that you will now, as always, accept the accidents of fortune with better submission."

I saw that the fat merchant had been eager to speak for some time, and now he jumped up and opened his mouth wide. But I laughed, and, sweeping my hat to the saddle, pulled off the mare and left 'em, with the lady staring in an amaze at the casket on her knee.

"Drive on," says I to the coachman; and,

slapping the leaders with the flat of my sword as I passed, I spurred Calypso across their noses and out upon the furze-grown common. As I did so, there was Creech and Blake clattering up on their blown nags. Crack goes the coachman's whip, and the horses plunged forward ; but by that I was out of sight behind a clump of trees upon the heath, where, pausing, I looked back. The noise of a great commotion reached me ; and there, as I guessed, stood Creech with t'others about the coach. I reckon that the passengers would have short shrift with that angry party. I watched 'em for a while, with my sides a-shaking for laughter, and then put the nag to a trot across the common. Dan, I vow, must have been astonished. But 'twas a pretty even division after all ; for I kept the gold-finches and Creech resumed his jewels, whereas Hoity-toity had the privilege to take a lesson in manners.

THE TURTLE-DOVES

'T IS not the first face of a predicament that is always the right aspect, and men may, as often as not by holding their peace, come at the heart of the matter, always provided there is naught in the case to make the blood sing. Now in a pretty lively turn of life on the road I have met many types, and some of these such characters as you would scarce credit; but 'tis not always that they are conjoined thus in their odd individualities with a stirring episode; and hence I pass them by in these accounts of my career. Nevertheless there was in the meeting with Sir Damon Boll that which pleased me mightily, at least in the end. Indeed, 'twas a rare piece of chicanery from the outset, what time I left the Boar's Head in a chaise and two horses of my own for Epsom, like any gentleman with an important journey of his own before him. And so in truth I had, for I was to set up for my lord, if you please, with a lackey and all; but the affair, though 'twas humorous beyond fancy, enters not into this adventure. It was enough that the thought tickled me on my road out of Southwark,

going by Camberwell and Newington, and I was in a fair good humour as we rocked along the ruts that sharp November evening.

When the postilion was come out by Streatham and was for making across the heath, the moon, that was half and bright, struck into the lowering clouds, and the open waste glowed of a sudden swiftness. The window of the chaise was open and the air streamed in, but I could make out little with my peepers because of the blackness. And here there was a savage rocking of the body of the chaise, and a cracking as of a wheel against something. So popped I forth my head and roared to the postilion, cursing him for his clumsiness, and he cursing back at the horses ; and between us there was a pretty commotion. For here was a nobleman (save me !) upon his travels with a damned dung-fork of a rascal on whom he might let loose his tongue and be not questioned. That was how I phrased it to myself, being not as wroth as I seemed, but indeed enjoying to feign it ; when withdrawing my head, as we were got back again upon the track, I espied a blacker shadow in the blackness about the heath.

It held my eye a moment, for I knew it well enough to be the figure of a man, and then it darted into nearer view ; and the light, bettering at the same instant, showed

me a fellow with a hat askew on the back of his head, a heavy pistol at the stand-and-deliver, and a face under a dark mask at the chaise's edge.

“Hold!” says he loudly to the postilion, and catches at the horse nearest. The frightened fellow pulled in, and says this night-bat, as boldly as you will, and as cheerfully, poking his barker through the window, “now, my good sir, pray do not dally, but hand out forthwith. Dalliance, my dear sir, is the spirit of my lady’s chamber, not of snapping sharp winter nights like this. Disgorge, my buck, disgorge!”

Now you will conceive it was an odd situation for Galloping Dick to be thus way-laid and handled after the manner of his own craft, though this was not the first occasion that it had happened. But to that you will add this, that there was that in his air, as in his voice, and in the very swagger of his challenge, which showed me here was no ordinary tobyman. So says I to myself, silently gazing in his pistol: “What have we here?” And then aloud said I: “Sirrah, what do you?” in a lordly tone.

“Faith,” says he, not lowering his pistol, but speaking in a rollicking way, “be not my words plain, brave knight, or must I make ‘em bark? I require of you all that you

have in the chaise, barring what I will spare you out of charity, your clothes and cock-hat for the sake of shame."

"Oh!" said I, in a hesitating way, "then are you a gentleman of the road, rascal?"

"You honour me to put a name upon me," said he, with an inclination of his head. "For myself, I should desire to go unnamed, so as to escape the perils of the law."

"I will tell you this," I broke out in seeming indignation, "you shall be well hanged—that's your destiny."

"Maybe," said he, carelessly. "As well be picked by crows on a gallows as in a ditch. Deliver, my lord."

"I ask your indulgence, Captain," said I, in another voice; "there is a packet I would fain keep—"

"Pish! I must have all or none," he interposed. "Yet I am in a mood to indulge you, so be you give me your hand on paper that I took all off you."

This made me perpend, for my wits are sharp, and I began to guess that this was maybe by way of a wager, and that the fool was rattling the dice on his life.

"I will do that," said I, after a pause, "if you will let this document that is important to none but myself remain. I have sixty guineas also."

"Hand 'em over," says he, in a jocose way.

His pistol was still at my head, and I made search for my purse and gave it to him, the which he pocketed without so much as examining it.

"And for this warranty," said he, "I have quill and paper ;" whereat I knew that I was upon the right thought. He put a hand into his pocket, but being by now unsuspecting that he had any to deal with save a mild sheep, he paid little heed to his earlier precautions ; and the next I had his pistol hand in my clutch. He was taken aback at the first, but struggled gamely, though (Lord save us !) he was no match for me. With a twist of the wrist his pistol fell to the road with a dull clank, and presently I had the door of the chaise open and was gripping him in the darkness. And now 'twas my barker that was against his forehead.

"I was mistook," said I, as he came to a pause in his struggles, "and 'tis not the gallows will have you, sure, but this cold barrel o' mine. And so say your prayers."

He uttered a little reckless laugh. "Oh, I will spare you them," says he ; "doubtless you're in haste to be on."

"Come," said I, "off with that mask," and I knocked it clean off his face with the pistol, just as the moon emerged in her full whiteness.

'Twas a young man, well-formed, and of a handsome bearing, that stood before me, and I saw that his features were disfigured by a cynical smile. Yet there was in that expression, as I judged, something impulsive and full-hearted that took me. I contemplated him.

"You're no tobyman" said I. "A tobyman would think shame to be took as I took you just now."

For answer he whistled, and then, "Good my man, get forward with your job," said he. "I have cast and lost."

"Why," said I, lowering my barker, "I know 'twas along of a wager this was done, and so bungled."

He threw me a glance under the moon without offering to run. "How know you?" he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Rip me," said I, "when a gentleman of the road takes the road (save he be in liquor) 'tis for a serious purpose, and that's guineas. He walks with a proper gait; he's no come-lightly. But you—" I came to a pause.

"You're wrong," said he, "'twas no wager."

"Oh, well," said I "'tis a pity that so fit a youth should gó woo the Triple Beam, and I find it in my heart to give you a chance. What say you? Your story for your life."

He thought a moment. "Agreed," said he.

“ ‘Tis no harm and no good to no one. If your ears itch you shall have it.”

“ Then ‘tis sealed on that,” I replied, and happened to look away a moment from him.

In the moonlight the heath emerged dimly, and I descried near a patch of bushes a waiting figure.

“ So,” said I, “ that is your game, my master. You bring confederates, and accept of my terms to betray me. Damme, but I will shoot ye both where ye stand or run.”

Now, I was broke out very furious, for it seemed to me that I saw the whole purpose of this ambush very clearly, and I raised my pistol as I spoke.

“ What’s that ? ” said he, suddenly, and stared at me, and then away to where my eyes had gone. But at that instant the waiting figure took to its heels and ran in a white light, limping as it ran till it vanished swiftly into the darkness.

“ By the Lord, Crookes ! ” said my toby-man.

“ So,” said I, not now realising where I was, but feeling cautiously ahead. “ And who may Crookes be that’s such a white-liver ? ”

“ ‘Tis Sir Damon’s servant,” said he, and added : “ ‘Tis in the tale and the bargain.”

“ In that case,” said I, “ let’s have the tale

and the bargain ere my mind shifts, as it is apt to do of a cold November night."

He shrugged his shoulders. "You have the advantage, and 'twill hurt nor harm none. Sir Damon Boll is uncle and guardian to a young lady who returns me my passion. But he will none of the match, being anxious to dispose of her to a certain lord. This evening I besought him to acquiesce in our betrothal, but he refused.

"' If it be money' said I. "'Tis not money,' says he, with his grin. ' If it be place and position,' said I again, but again he interrupted me. "'Tis neither,' says he. 'Ye're well enough, man, but who weds my niece must prove himself. Ye're a young gentleman of the town,' says he. ' When I was young we was wont to be more than that ; and, by God ! young man,' says he, ' ye shall have her if ye rob a coach or carry stand-and-deliver to a chaise.' ' What mean you ? ' said I, not knowing what he meant. "' If so be,' said he, speaking more slowly, ' you shall have spirit and temper enough to take all that is within a traveller's chaise this night you have my word you shall have my niece.'"

"Well," said I, seeing he paused.

"Well, here I am," said he, and laughed discordantly.

"Come, 'tis a very proper and romantic

comedy," said I. "And why d'ye suppose he gives you this chance?"

He shook his head. "I know not," he said.

"And why d'ye suppose this Crookes, Sir Damon's man, if that be his name, is hanging about?"

He started. "I never thought of that," said he.

"Well," said I, deliberately, "it means if I was you, young cockerel, I would think twice ere I put faith in Sir Damon Boll. He hath you in a cleft stick."

"You mean—" he asked anxiously.

"Why, are you not took in the act?" I replied; "took with a red hand. And why runs that rogue back to his master? He hath followed you."

"Damnation!" says he, starting, and looks at me.

"Upon my heart," I said, "ye're a pretty fellow to take to the roads, with no more prudence or care about you than a sucking dove. If I mistake not, down flies this Crookes with news of your discomfiture, as he would also have been witness to your success; and presently maybe up comes Sir Damon to gloat upon you. Oh, I have a fondness for such deep, ripe rascals, stap me, I have!"

He stood moodily fiddling with his fingers,

a frown on his brow. "Well?" said he at last inquiringly, and smiling defiant.

"Well," said I, "I think I will have a look at this Sir Damon, and gads me! if there be not the sound of a vehicle. Would ye like another fling at the high toby?"

He looked at me in wonder, and I winked.

"Should this be Sir Damon—"

He whistled. "Now, damme," he cried briskly, "ye're the gamest cock that ever crowed out of Whitehall."

"Well, let's go to meet him and seek what we shall find," I said, for I did not want that the arriving carriage should come up with mine; and so bestowing an order on my wondering fellow, we walked back briskly upon the London Road.

The night was still relieved by the pale moon that shone through the naked oaks behind us, and we could perceive the huddle of a chaise separating out of the darkness a score or two of yards away.

"'Tis his livery," says my friend, "'tis his coach for sure."

"Well, may I perish, but he runs a hazard this night, does this said Sir Damon," I said with a laugh, and I took him by the arm. "Look you," says I, "you were but a bantam, with a bantam's voice yonder. You shrilled too high, damme, for your spurs. If you would

venture another main, take heed to one that knows, and keep your eyes straight—as straight as your weapon. With level hands and eyes, rot me ! I would be afraid of nothing under heaven save stalking ghosts and ill-willing witches. Set on, man, if so you have a mind, and I'll wager you will go through with the adventure."

"Gad !" says he, with his laugh, " I will pluck him bare for his pains, and enjoy it. I am your debtor, sir, for this night's topsy-turvy."

Just then the chaise rocked into the faint light before us that stood in the darkness of the trees, and he made a step forward, halted as if in doubt, and then dashed at it, shouting in a loud voice to the postilion. But I lay close in my earth, like an old fox, watching of 'em.

Well, the chaise was at a stand-still, and there was a hubbub, as you may fancy ; for the old gentleman was come out to see a highwayman took, and not to be rumpadded himself. But he was of a stout spirit, and though there was my young gentleman at the window with his barker, and his mask that he had refitted on him, I could descry a white head poked forth and a voice exchanging words sharply.

"Deliver !" says my man.

"Deliver ! I will see thee damned first," says the spirited old bubblyjock.

"I regret the necessity," says my man, presently, but his barker drew nearer.

"I will have this place scoured for you," said the old boy.

"If you make more ado," says my man, amiably, "I shall be in the sad case of dabbling white hairs red." With that, seeming to recognise the folly of resistance, Sir Damon sank back in his seat.

"What is't you want?" he asked in another voice.

"'Tis very simple," says t'other; "merely all that is in your chaise with you, save what clothes you sit in." And now that the man's head no longer blocked the window he pressed closer in, and at the same instant uttered an exclamation of surprise. And so I daresay did Sir Damon also, for he must have recognised by that saying with whom he had to deal; the which must have astonished him who came forth to see the young buck laid by the heels. But he gave vent to no sound just then, and 'twas my young gentleman of the toby who spoke.

"I will be content with nothing short of all that is with you, sir," said he, in a gay voice, as of one well content with himself and destiny. "And first, your purse."

Well, he must have got that, for says he next, "Now, your jewel-case;" and that too

came out of the window in the ghost of a hand that was like a woman's for slenderness. "Ye're prompt in payment, my dear sir," continues my friend, "for the which I thank ye as an exacting creditor. But you have still something by you."

Then comes in Sir Damon's voice, quite still and cool now. "You have all, sir—you have all. My word spells my honour, unless, indeed, you have changed your courteous intention about my clothes."

"Nay, I leave none bare," says he, "in particular to those wild winds. But I see you have company, and fair company too;" at the which, as you may guess, I pricked up my ears and moved forward a step out of the darkness.

"Well, sir," says Sir Damon from the coach, sharply, "would you rob the lady also?"

"No," says he, with a laugh, "only of your company. I trust I am a gallant tobyman, if even upon compulsion. In truth I have no real liking for the business, but was driven to it of necessity. Yet while I am in it I must e'en make what I can out of it. And since I must take all that is in the chaise, save yourself, my good sir, I will make bold with the lady if she will forgive me."

Hearing that, I could have slapped my thigh in my delight at his wit and quickness,

for I began at once to see how matters stood. Here was Sir Damon driving forth with his ward and niece, maybe with the intent that she should publicly witness with her own eyes the wretched plight and humiliation of her lover ; and now that lover appears to discomfit her guardian and wrest her triumphantly from his arms. It was an excellent fine ploy and tickled me much ; for, damme, 'twas after my own heart.

But when he had spoken Sir Damon answers nothing for a time, and then seeing, I suppose, that he was beaten all round he says,—

“Very well,” says he, “I am, as I have assured you, my good scoundrel, a man of my word and honour. So what I have said I have said. You have now your wages, and shall have your reward, though I confess I had not anticipated it. But to-morrow 'tis my turn, for I too have an unexpected card in the game. And so, when the lady is safely alighted in this balmy air and on this cosy heath, at your disposal, I shall be obliged if you will order my man to drive on, so that I may finish this somewhat benighted journey in peace.”

This was, you will admit, a dignified surrender, and I could not but see that he was really at the advantage. For though the lad had won his wages and his bride, he

was at the mercy of this man, as hard as Satan, maybe, or as grim as Death. And he would go hang on the beam for this night's work, if so be Sir Damon desired it, and this, you may conceive, was not a pleasant plight for the young fellow. But, bless you, he had no fears. He had won his bet, and he had handed forth his sweetheart, and was, I doubt not, all in a flurry of passion for the meeting. Bah ! this love turns men dizzy ; it steals their wits more wildly than wine. Let be ! 'Tis well enough in a way, but, rip me, if I would be so rankly stirred. The old cock had the advantage and knew it. He gazed out at the silly pair from his window with hard eyes and expressionless face, and shouted a command to his man, at which the chaise turned and began to move slowly towards London again. At that instant, seeing how awkward a face things wore, and being of a mind to see the stir through to the end, a notion flashed in my head and I came forward to the couple. Miss I could not see, for she was in wraps, and she might have been a scullion-wench for all I could tell. But says I to him,—

“ See you, take my coach and drive on to the Nag by Carshalton and there await me. I will deal with this Lord Chief Justice myself ; ” and leaving 'em with no more words I ran after the departing chaise as fast as maybe.

When I had reached it I rapped on the window, and out pops the old gentleman's white head once more.

"Another of you?" says he; "this place grows 'em like brambles," and would have discharged a pistol full in my face.

"Hold!" said I, "'tis your assistance I want, sir. I believe you have been rumpadded by a tobyman just now. Well, I am in a like case, and was bound whilst he took you. But now he is gone off with my chaise, and I beg you will join us in pursuit. Sure, sir," seeing nothing on his face but its pale mask, "we be enough, armed as we are, to overtake and bring him to account, especially that he hath with him now, as it seems, some go-lightly. But I cannot without my coach o'ertake them."

He seemed to consider a little, scrutinising me. "Well," said he, at last, "you seem a likely man in emergencies. If you are armed, as you say, and have the resolution, I do not know but the plan will fit in with my own. I had another design, but maybe both are admirable, and at least they will not conflict."

So without more ado he invited me into the chaise, and then conceive me sitting in miss's place, the horse's heads turned again for the south, and Sir Damon and Dick Ryder chatting agreeably and affably together

as they had been sworn friends or long acquaintances.

At least 'twas I that chatted, and he was mostly silent in an amicable enough way, interjecting a question, or commenting with satiric humour, what time we lurched along towards Ewell and Epsom. But now you will have an inkling of my design when I say that if this old fox was permitted to return straightway to town he would no doubt set the officers on his enemy and have him forthwith lodged in the jug. Maybe, thought I to myself, with a little trickery and a little persuasion of my own kind, that could be prevented and the boy have a run for his life at the least. So that was why we were jogging along the Epsom Road through a dark and miry night on the track (as he thought) of the runaways.

Presently, interrupting a tale of mine about Jeremy Starbottle, says he, bluffly,—

“We seem no nearer, sir. It would look as if your horses were superior to mine.”

“Why,” said I, in answer, “ ‘tis odds they’ll keep this road, for the sideways are foul and lead nowhither. Moreover, they will not expect to be pursued. We shall fetch ‘em presently.”

“Very well,” says he, lying back, “but I beg you will give me a little leave. I was shortened of my nap this afternoon.”

Now this was a plain hint, as you see, for me to hold my tongue, but I took no offence, for there was no occasion. "Sir," said I, "I am mum. I do not overstay my welcome," and I too lay back.

For some time we proceeded in silence; but presently, the chaise jogging more than usual, he sat up.

"It seems to me," said he, "that we are upon a wild-goose chase, we shall not catch him in this wilderness."

"Oh," said I, "he cannot be so far in advance—not he with my nags, I'll warrant."

He looked at me doubtfully in the small light. "Very well," he said at last, shortly, "we will try a little longer;" and he peered out upon the night if so be he might determine where we were.

I looked out also, and now we were passing through Carshalton, where I had bid the doves assemble for to meet me. But, damme, my business was not yet done, and the coach rolls creaking out of Carshalton and on the way to Epsom. This seemed to stir the old gentleman again to perplexity, for again he directed a look out of the window, and then another at me. I felt his gaze wander over me from top to boot as if he measured me.

"You have fought abroad," says he at last.

"Not I," says I; and added to that, "There's too many that babble about these foreign wars. Deliver us, a good English war is more to my taste, and better fighting too," says I.

"Ah!" says he, still coolly inspecting me, as if he cared not whether I saw him or not, "then you will have fought in his Majesty's intestine wars?" said he.

"What's that?" said I, turning on him.

"No doubt," said he, suavely, "you have fought, sir, for his Majesty King James against the unfortunate Duke of Monmouth."

"Who gave you leave to suppose I have fought at all?" said I, sharply, being irked by his persistence. "I am no fighting man, but one of peace."

"Oh," says he, "but I took you for a soldier and a captain-at-arms at least. And indeed I believe you would have furnished material for a good soldier." He surveyed me meditatively. "Yes, I'll promise that; good material, sir, sound fighting stock, and no splitting straws or scruples."

"Damme," said I, bluntly, "what d'ye mean?"

He sank back in his seat. "I mean no offence," said he, "but I think as 'tis shrewd to-night I will e'en turn about for home."

"Nay," said I, masterfully, "you must not do that since we are come so far. Let us

finish the adventure, sir, and not leave hold of it. 'Twould never do. We will be catching of 'em by the heels presently."

He pursed his lips together, as if he whistled under his breath, and there was a pause, while the noise of the chaise drowned all sound about us. But my senses are not sharp for nothing, and next I was aware of a glint of light upon steel, for the moon as we rocked swayed in at the window, and I guessed that he was bringing his pistol from under his cloak.

I pulled forth mine abruptly. "Yes," says I, "'tis as well to be prepared, sir. I am glad you are so forward. We may have a fall-to when we encounter, but I'll warrant ye're as good with your barker as I with mine."

"I hope so," said he, without betraying any feeling. "I do earnestly hope so; even, sir, to be a little better would be to my taste. As you say, we may come to an encounter soon, and 'tis as well to be prepared."

Now the old buck puzzled me, and I perpended. If he had any suspicion that this was not a genuine pursuit, and I was other than I had feigned to be, why sat he there silent and cool? But if he had no scent of danger what was the significance of his words, which did smell to me of the ironic? It angered me to be so baffled by him and his quiet features; but

I did not well see what I might do or say just then, and so kept silence like himself. And indeed 'twas he broke it.

"We must be drawing nigh Ewell, so far as I may guess," he said. "Would you be good enough to tell me what course you propose when we reach Ewell? If I might without impropriety make a humble suggestion, I would advise that we ate some supper and lay there comfortably for the night, to resume this interesting journey doubtless on the morrow, or perhaps the next day."

With that I saw at once how it was, and I gave vent to a little laugh. "Why, you shall do as you please, sir," said I, "and that plan will serve me admirably."

"Ah!" says he, looking at me, "then maybe there is something amiss with it. Suppose we come to an understanding. I think you are too young, and I am too old, to want to die by violence. We both have a taste for life, I take it. Where stand we then? We are pursuing a gentleman of the road—"

"Pardon me," said I, interrupting, for the time was come now to disclose myself, and I looked to be mightily tickled by the disclosure, "no longer pursuing, but maybe even pursued."

"Pursued!" he asked doubtfully.

"Well, at least we are some miles ahead of

the turtle-doves that are cooing, maybe, somewhere safe and sound behind us."

His eyes never changed; only the thin lips moved a little. "Ah!" says he, "the turtle-doves! I had some notion—but who then are you, my dear sir?"

"I am but a philosophic observer," said I, airily. "'Tis my business to look on and smile. I take no part in the rough acts of fortune."

"Pardon me," said he, suavely, "but I think you are too modest, Captain."

"Captain!" said I, sharply.

"Well, well, I had forgot you were no soldier. You have the air of a soldier, and the makings, as I have remarked. But, sir, let me tell you, you are too modest. This journey, for example—"

"Oh, that was my whim," said I. "I interposed out of a benevolent heart, for to serve two young folks fond of billing and to make an illustrious acquaintance for myself."

He bowed in his corner. "I trust you will not make a more illustrious acquaintance still," he said dryly.

"Why," said I, for I knew what he meant, "you forget that at your invitation I am here in pursuit of our common enemy."

"True," he said, considering. "It has a smooth face upon it. I perceive you, sir, to be a gentleman of your wits."

Now 'twas my turn to bow, and indeed he was not wrong, for it has ever been my good fortune to find a way out of a difficulty when others would stand agape, like oafs and asses. But he went on, in his still voice: "But now that I see our friend, the common enemy, as you put it, enjoyed a confederate, it appears I must reconsider the circumstances. In fine, his wager fails—"

"I am no confederate," I broke in.

"And thus there is no necessity that he receive the penalty which I had designed as a wedding-present for him," he finished, not appearing to heed me.

"Sir Damon, I have told you that I am but an onlooker," said I.

He elevated his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders.

"Rip me," said I, angrily, "I never clapped eyes on the fellow till the quarter-of-an-hour ere you came up, and I will be damned if I should tick him off from Adam did I see him again."

"You perceive that you are rehabilitating the penalty," he remarked dryly, and I could see he did not credit me, which made me angrier.

"By the Lord," said I, "I have the honour to tell ye that the young muckworm rum-padded me in my chaise just as you were

come up—damme, he did, if it were not that I turned his barkers on him."

Sir Damon eyed me and then all of a sudden broke out into soft laughter, as if he were greatly tickled.

"Is't so?" said he. "The Lord love him for a simpleton! Faith, I could forgive—" He chuckled quietly, and then looked at me again, still smiling.

"You know, sir, what penalty menaces them that abduct or hold a ward from her guardian?"

"'Tis a guardian I have abducted from his ward," said I.

He laughed quietly. "Very well," said he, "let us leave it at that." And then, "You know, sir, what a fool the fool is?"

"He is no tobyman," said I.

"'Tis commensurate with his life in general," said Sir Damon, easily. "He is born Tom-fool and has two handsome, dancing eyes." He paused. "I will not maintain," says he next, "that for happiness wisdom is necessary, or even adequate. I have not found it so myself, nor perhaps you, friend—Captain?"

"In that case," says I, "repay a fool with his folly, which is marriage."

"Then we are agreed," said he, genially. "I too am a bachelor. And now that we are agreed on one thing, Captain, Mr—" He hesitated.

"Ryder," said I.

"Mr Ryder," said he, "let us be agreed all along the line. If I forego the penalty—"

"I will treat your worship to as damnable a fine supper and bottle as was ever served in England," I interrupted, "and we will drink to the turtles at Carshalton."

"Carshalton," he says reflectively. "I had an idea 'twas Carshalton, but your pistol was persuasive."

"Well, sir," said I, "here is Ewell, and in a tavern that I know we shall be hospitably received and used this foul night."

"Good," says he, preparing to alight as the chaise came to a stop, "and pray bear in mind, Mr Ryder, that I am penniless and homeless."

"Damme," said I, heartily, "ye're welcome to all that's mine, and that's not beggary; and, damme, while I can keep such company I envy not the turtle with his mate at Carshalton."

He was now in the road, and he turned. "Nor I, Ryder, nor I," he said pleasantly.

MY LADY'S RING

AS I wheeled the mare out of the gateway into the gloom of the night the lighted windows of the inn winked on me with yellow eyes. A cold sleet was falling, very piercing to the flesh, and I rolled my collar higher about my neck. It came upon me then that I was a fool to leave that warm and comfortable tavern on such a savage night; but 'twas Christmas Eve, and seven of the clock, and I was for Bristol on the following day, where was a doxy that I knew, as pretty a parcel as ever I did see, saving Polly Scarlet, and she was in London.

The landlord had joined me in a bottle well-laced with brandy, and being of a lively and generous disposition had furnished another himself. 'Twas a lonely inn that stood on the border of the moor, and says he that he was mightily gratified to be in company.

So 'twas with a full belly and a merry heart that I turned into the welter of the night. 'Twas rarely cold, and I whistled as I went, though the breath of my nostrils went up like reek. Now

I was in the mind, being amply loaded and light-spirited, to be amiable with the devil himself, if so be he should come that way, though 'twas, for sure, not the night for him. Certainly I was not thinking of rumpadding any mortal man, but would have taken him to my bosom for a fellow-traveller. For 'tis a vulgar error to suppose that gentlemen of the road are for ever with an eye to goldfinches. Money is muck for us as often as not, at least to such of us as maintain a proper dignity. But as for Dan Creech and his lousy pack, or that much-boasted Jeremy Starbottle, why, they are no better than common cut-purses or tally-thieves. No ; to ride the high toby has its obligations as well as its privileges, and on that Christmas Eve, damme, the whole world and his wife might have gone secure for me.

Well in this humour, despite of the night, I rode on, sometimes at a jog, but mostly at a walk, for the snow was heavier as I reached the moor. Upon the stretch of broken land it lay uneven, for I suppose 'twas caught by the rough winds on that upland heath and blown into the hollows, and upon the furze and thorn. But the continuous spread of whiteness had absorbed the road, and Calypso had to feel her way mighty patiently. 'Twas thus we arrived at the cross-roads near the middle of the moor,

where the ways divide 'twixt Bollingham and Messiter ; and reining in on the impulse, to make sure of my path, I perceived even through the blackness another figure on horseback under the sign-post.

"Is't anyone ?" says a voice, pretty clear.

"Ay," says I, "'tis a traveller."

"Is there a village near by ?" says he out of the dark.

"Within three miles two upon either road," said I.

"I am bound for Bath," says he, "and have met with a mishap this cursed night," and began to deliver oaths as they had been sword-thrusts in a duello. Now I can tolerate a man that has been put to sore discomfort and is enraged, and as for a few mouth-filling oaths, why, they are neither here nor there. But there was something in the way of his voice, manner and address that grated on me, and so I answered him pretty coolly.

"Well, you can take your choice of roads with an easy heart," I said.

"Look ye here," says he, after a moment. "From what I catch of you through your voice, my man, you should be a sturdy fellow. What think you of carrying a message for help to the village for a guinea-piece. 'Twill serve

you with good wine, mulled ale, or a doxy, I'll warrant."

That maddened me for all my good humour, to be taken for granted as a common fetch-and-carry, and to be so addressed like a footboy by his grace. I heard insolence and overbearing in his accent, and I would have sworn patronage and contempt was in his face.

"Be damned!" says I, angrily, "I am no lackey. Find your own village," says I.

At that he uttered an oath. "You are impudent!" said he, and moved his horse nearer, as though he would take action. But, Lord, I was awaiting him, and this muck-worm would have eaten snow in two minutes had he so ventured. But prudence came to him, so he hesitated. "Ye're the sort of man that is the better of the whip and the pillory," says he. "Rogue, were it not for the darkness I would beat you for your insolence."

"Damme, what's amiss with the darkness?" said I. "For sure I can well make out your ugly body against the snow. 'Tis a monstrous, unsightly blackness against so much innocent whiteness." He cursed me, and then dug his rowels into his nag so deeply that the poor beast started and reared. But that was enough for me, for I hate to see a

creature that is so kindly in its services so mishandled ; and so says I, driving at him,—

“ Rip me, you muck-worm, I'll give you that which will recall this moor to you. Deliver, damn ye ! ” says I, “ or I'll make you food for maggots ; ” and I had the barker at his head ere he knew what had happened.

Well, he made much ado, but 'twas of no avail, for I had the mastery from the outset, and he was perforce obliged to plumb his pockets, the which yielded but a score of guineas and a ring or so. But that was of no consequence to me, for I had no care for his money, merely for his discomfiture, along of his arrogance.

As I left him, foully imprecating, I threw a laughing word at him. “ Messiter,” says I, “ lies on the left, and Bollingham to the right. Turn round three times, my cock, and choose which you will,” whereat I rode laughing into the darkness, yet ere I did so I saw him savagely wheel into the Messiter Road, cutting viciously at his horse.

As for me, I rode on, singing cheerfully enough, for the encounter had warmed my blood, and I no longer felt the cold so greatly. But I had not got farther than a mile from the cross-roads when I was aware in the pause of my singing of a sound near by, of a voice that

called on the unquiet air, very faint and melancholy. I reined in, and listened, and presently the cry came to me again from the right ; and so, jumping off the mare, I left her in the road, standing obedient as she was used to do, and walked gingerly in that direction. I did not trust myself in that profound darkness and the treacherous snow, and, sure enough, I was right to be careful, for in a little I was plunged up to my waist in a hollow.

“Where are you ?” I called aloud, and the voice, so clearly now a woman’s, came back.

I made my way to it with difficulty, and soon solved the riddle ; here was a chaise wandered out of the road and buried in a deep drift, and by the body of the carriage a poor lady in the direst state of distress and terror.

“Why, madam,” said I, “are ye alone ?”

At which she broke out that her husband was gone for help, as was the postilion, but in different directions, and that they had took the horses, and that she, poor delicate creature, was thus solitary on a naked and solitary moor, with never even a wild-fowl to scream with her for company.

“Oh,” says I, “we will soon mend that, madam, or call me catch-pole,” and I took hold of her. “Ye’re in a drift, mistress,” I said. “I’ll give ye company, if ye will have

it, until your husband shall return"—and then all of a sudden it flashed upon me that her husband was he who had abused me so grossly, and whom I had rumpadded.

"Phew!" says I to myself, "why, here's a pretty comedy." But the lady was all that occupied my thoughts just then, and so I conducted her to the road, and encouraged her into talk as I did so, for she was in a terrible fluster, what with the loneliness and the cold and the darkness.

"Now," says I, "what you need, madam, is a posset of hot brandy and a warm and virtuous couch," I says, "and with the help of my good nag here 'tis what you'll have."

"Oh, sir, you are very good," says she, tremulously. "You are good beyond Christian seeming."

That tickled me pleasantly, as you may think, and I was the more disposed to take charge of this poor creature thus left to starve of the perishing winds of heaven. It rains not clemency from December skies in this brisk isle of England. So says I, in a cheering voice,—

"I'll warrant you shall toast your toes and warm your stomach with victuals within the better part of an hour. Faith, pin your hopes

on me, mistress, and you shall not be disappointed. 'Tis not the first time Dick Ryder has comforted and succoured the fair. There's Dick's luck, madam."

She smiled in a weak way, but began to take some confidence, as I could see from the new note in her voice.

" Is it far, sir, to shelter ? " she asked, and I told her there was an inn some two miles distant, at which she plucked up her heart once more, not knowing (bless her folly) that two miles on that wild moor, and with that drift of snow, was no matter for spoon-fed babes. But as chance had it, she made the discovery pretty quickly, and that through no fault or neglect of mine. For I put her upon Calypso —as gentle a mare, when needs be, as ever was straddled ; and, sure enough, she was straddled now. For my lady could keep no seat otherwise, and so says I to her, if she would play the man for the nonce we should maybe be the sooner out of our troubles. 'Twas then for the first time that I saw there was good blood and spirit to her ; for instead of crying out in protest that she could not, or she would not, or that she dared not, says she,—

" Oh, think you so ? " and over she cocks her foot with the best grace in the world, and

a charming genuflexion to boot. "I fear I trouble you greatly," says she.

But, Lord, with such an one (duchess or doxy, dame or dirty-face) I would have gone to the farthest verge of trouble and made no odds of it: 'Tis spirit that ever has appealed to me.

Well, we were no sooner astir, Calypso pegging slowly along with me at her mouth-piece, than there comes over us a flurry of snow, driving full and hard in our faces, the which blinded me for the time. But when I recovered the mare was gone from the road and had took a step into a hollow. She staggered, and plump goes the lady over her head into the drift. I hauled her forth, breathless as she was, and all she cried out when the wind was in her again was,—

"I fear I did not hold to her properly. I fear I am a bungler."

"Bless your heart, no," says I. "It would have took a king's regiment to have sat that fall. You do mighty well," said I, "and I'd wring his nose that said no to that;" with which I assisted her once more into the saddle.

What with the drift and the darkness, and the squalls of snow, it was an hour and more before we reached the inn which lay on the road to Bollingham. Arrived here I rapped

out the landlord, who was surprised to see me returned—"not but what you are wise," says he. But when he saw the lady and heard my tale he was, being a decent kindly fellow, all of a bustle. Madam was all a-wet from her sojourn in the snow, to say nothing of her tumble, and so she was set afore a great fire in the ingle to dry herself, which she did with sincere appreciation, the while the host prepared supper. She sat there, her hands extended, drawing in deep breaths of comfort from the grateful blaze, and I watched her. 'Twas the first I had seen of her face, which was of a delicate beauty, pink from the whipping wind, and crowned with disordered hair. I judged she was of a quality deemed proper in courts, and she was young withal. Presently says she, looking round at me with bright soft eyes,—

"Do you think," said she, "that my husband has reached safety?"

"Why, yes," said I, "for though he be not here, he may have taken the other road and be at Messiter," the which I knew it was likely he had done.

"Oh!" said she, as if thinking, and said no more.

But nearby after that supper was served, and madam was set to take in company with

your faithful servant, by your leave ! Not but what I have not often supped with the quality, ay, and made merry with them too, man and woman, and of all ages ; for we are served in our calling with strange accidents. Yet I will confess that to be seated there at table with her tickled me handsomely, and I fell to with a will. But the lady showed little appetite, and had an anxious look, and thought I that she was troubled for her husband ; but I soon made out that she was not so concerned, for said I, to stimulate her,—

“ Maybe he is supping like us in a cosy room at Messiter.”

“ Oh ! ” said she, and I saw her mind had come back from another quarter. “ He is like to sup and be comfortable wherever he is. He will emerge scatheless ; ” and there was that in her tone which was all but a sneer.

“ Oh, well, damn the husband,” says I to myself, “ I take no interest in him ; ” and I gave my attention to the lady. The glow had now receded from her face, leaving it pale, according to what I took to be its true habit, and she answered in a pleasant and engaging way, with an emphasis of her gratitude for my assistance. But this I pooh-

poohed in curt terms, for I was more than repaid for my trouble by the figure she cut over against the board, and the honour she did me. And I was in the midst of rebuffing her thanks for the third time when the door opened from the flagged passage and a man entered.

He was followed by the innkeeper, suave and bowing, and the first thing was that madam says, in an even, pleasant voice,—

“So you are behind us after all, Charles.” At that I studied him the closer, for it must be her husband, and perhaps he that had put an affront on me, and I knew for certain who he was when he spoke.

“It seems so,” said he, scowling at me; and then “Why did you not wait? I found you gone from the chaise.”

“It was so cold. I was chilled to death,” she answered, “and this gentleman happened upon me, and was so good as to offer me his services for a rescue.”

He turned a glowering, arrogant eye on me, but said nothing at the moment, save a demand to the innkeeper to fetch mulled wine. Now, 'twas clear he was in ignorance of my identity, and so I was emboldened to make trial of him, maybe, you will say, with some rashness; but I have ever found the boldest course is the wisest.

"Perhaps, sir," said I, "you will honour me with a share of this bottle in the meanwhile."

He hesitated, and then lowered his eyes. "I thank you, no, sir," he returned briefly, and sat down to the fire to wait.

His ungraciousness nettled me, all the more that he thus deranged the comfort of his own lady, who was manifestly put about by his incivility. Seeing that he knew not I had rumpadded him he might have thrown thanks at me for her care, even if 'twere only as you may throw coins at a beggar. But not he. He sat and frowned, and then looked up at her.

"The next time I pray you will have faith and patience to remain where you are set, my lady," says he, curtly.

"Why, husband—" she began, but I broke in, for I was infuriate with his grossness of manner.

"Look you, sir," said I, "would you have a tender lady bare to the snow and sour winds to await your convenience? Sink me, I should be glad to think she was warming of her ankles, what fate soever came to mine."

"Your opinion," said he, pompously, and looking at me inquisitively, "is naturally of weight, sir."

He was a full-faced, big-nosed man, with small eyes, and a hard mouth, but was mani-

festly of some dignity from his dress and style.

“Sir Charles,” says she, with a little pride in her voice, “you forget my plight. I should have perished but for this good gentleman.”

“Humph,” says this pig, puffing out his nostrils, and leaned over the fire to warm himself, but cast narrow glances at me.

But here comes in mine host with the wine, and Sir Charles (if that was his name) sits to the table, and takes a draught, which served to loosen his tongue.

“These roads,” says he, “do no credit to your country, my man.”

“Sir, they are such as we must endure,” says the innkeeper.

“They are a disgrace to any country,” says he; “they are the haunt of thieves and cut-throats,” he says, and thumped on the table.

“Why, I’ve heard of none, your honour,” says the fellow.

“I tell you, sir,” he went on, “that no more than a mile or so from here I was stopped by a ruffian and robbed—yes, robbed, sir; and you boast of your secure roads. I am a justice and will see to it when I reach London.”

“Lord, sir, you say not so?” said the innkeeper, and the lady called out in surprise,

"Robbed, Charles ; why, what is this ? "

"Stopped and robbed," says the man, with emphasis on his words and looking from one to another of us. "Stopped and robbed by a dastard with pistols and swords, when I had been looking for a friendly voice in the night and the snow—rings, guineas and all," he says, addressing his wife.

"I have my purse," says she, fumbling in her bodice with nervous fingers.

"I will bring down the law on this wretched place," he declared formidably, ignoring her. "I will see that his Majesty's processes do clean these parts of the gentry, and of all who harbour them," he added, with suspicious beady eyes on the innkeeper.

"Nay, sir, there is no house on this road but what is honest," says he, hastily.

"Why," says Sir Charles, as importantly as if he were examining a prisoner, "this fellow must have come from here, and no doubt was in waiting for me. You cannot deny it."

"There was none such here, sir, all the day," says the landlord, humbly ; "there was none but honest folk."

"Ah, but how mark you the difference ? " he asked triumphantly. "I ask you, how do you discriminate ? Does a man wear his virtue on his nose ? " And at that, looking at

his blobbed nose, I chuckled to myself, for I minded in no way that he was thus cross-questioning the taverner. Lord, I would not have cared two sucking straws for such as he. So I broke in,—

“There is some that has an honest look,” said I, “and there’s some that wants it.”

“That is so,” said the lady. “ ’Twere easy to tell the difference.”

“You are very confident,” said he, sourly, “and maybe then you could read the faces in this room, madam ? ”

She glanced about her with a flush at his rudeness. “I think there is no question of this room,” she answered.

He said nothing, but shot a glance at me, and then took a draught of wine.

“And how was it this kind gentleman happened upon you, Betty ? ” he asked.

“Sir, ’twas a delicate voice, as of a lamb bleating in the cold darkness, that I heard, and went for to rescue,” I answered him coolly.

“Oh ! ” he says, and looked at the table as if thinking. “And whence came you ? ” he asked bluntly.

Now it entered into my mind then for the first time that he had conceived a suspicion of me. It was true that his bearing might be part of his customary gross conduct, but ’twas

possible that his questions were pursuing some point. And so, as the landlord was gone from the room, I said indifferently, "I am from Bristol and go south for Taunton."

"Ho!" he said, "then you came along the road after me?"

"Very like," I said with the same indifference. "I know not which way you came, as the chaise was buried deep in the drift."

"That brings to my memory," said he, rising, "a neglected duty. The postilion must take aid to rescue the carriage;" and he marched to the door with his heavy gait and determined mien.

When he was gone I looked across at the lady, but she avoided my eye, embarrassed (I made no doubt) by her husband's arrogant behaviour. And now I recalled that 'twas high time for me to be on my way after this interlude, and I put my hand into my pocket to bring forth a coin wherewith to discharge my reckoning. And I pulled out a handful of guineas. As I was picking out one I heard an exclamation, and raising my eyes, perceived that the lady was staring in astonishment at my hand.

"Where got you that?" she asked in an excitement, pointing with her hand. "Where got you that ring?"

And then to my chagrin I saw that I had pulled out some of the jewellery I had took from Sir Charles. "That?" says I, thinking to gain time. "Why that?"

"The ring I gave my husband," she almost whispered across the table, and her eyes met mine. In them suddenly arose a light of understanding, and of something else commingled. Damme, I am not ashamed to ply the high toby, but there is some matters that do not concern women, and which they do not understand. She turned of a red glow to her neck. "What—you?" she murmured faintly. "It was you?"

And I, like a fool, had never a word, but sat glum and still, staring at her. To look at her it would have seemed that she it was that had took the ring and been discovered.

"Oh, why did you that?" she asked in her low voice. "Was it that you were in need?"

"Faith, no," said I, with a laugh, and never attempting to deny. "There's a plenty of King's pictures to my pockets. But if ye will have it, 'twas his voice annoyed me. I thought 'twas any man's duty and right to take toll of such complacency."

She eyed me sadly, as I hate to be eyed. I can endure the devil's own temper, and a

scold's tongue (for I have my own cure for them), but tears, and shining eyes, and melancholy looks—I cannot abide 'em. So says I gruffly,—

“ Ye are welcome to them back. I have no use for them. Maybe 'twill teach him a lesson in manners, and that will serve ; ” whereat I turned the contents of my pocket upon the table and thrust them towards her. She sat looking at the gold and the jewels for some moments in silence, while I looked at her. She was, I'll warrant, a pious good woman, and though such are not generally to my taste, I can appreciate ripe goodness and beauty, and it irked me to think of her being bound with such a surly and unmannerly boar. But presently, with a start, she put out her hands and began to collect the pieces with fever in her haste, glancing fearfully at the door ; and no sooner had she disposed of them than in stalks my portentous friend, with an ugly look on his phiz.

“ You come from Bristol, sir,” says he in a loud voice, “ and maybe can explain why you set forth for Taunton from this very house two hours agone by the Bristol Road ? ”

I gave him a steady stare, for it was plain to me now how he had come by his information, and that he had been questioning the

innkeeper about me. It mattered not a rap to me, for he could prove nothing against me, and even if he had, I would have kissed the beam if I could not have settled with that hulking dung-fork. So said I equably,—

“ Why the devil should I explain to you ? ”

“ Well, to the justices, if you like it better,” said he with an angry snort. “ I had a notion that I recognised that voice, and now I know it for certain. You are the thief that made me deliver in the snow on the heath. You have stolen my guineas and my jewels.”

Now, he had no witnesses against me, and it would have been the easiest thing in the world to have deceived him, and played him off, and got him into a tangle of fact and evidence and imaginings. But, bless me, ere I could get fairly started upon the sally the poor lady darts in and shoves the fat in the fire.

“ Oh, Charles,” she cried trepidantly, going towards him, “ this gentleman has preserved my life. I pray you forget not that. ‘Tis Christmas Eve,” says she, “ ‘tis the eve of our Lord’s birth, and should teach us mercy. Sir Charles,” she says, poor thing, a-bleating, “ as you hope for Christ’s compassion for yourself visit not this short-coming

on one that has shown himself so full of tenderness and pity."

"The devil!" thinks I to myself, pulling a lugubrious face. "She plays King's prosecutor to me. What's to do?"

"Stand aside," says he to her sharply, and glowering on me. But I looked him in the phiz with a smile; I was not incommoded by this silly business, not I. "You make no denial," said he, restraining himself with an effort, as I could see. "You are a ruffianly gallows-bird. You shall hang."

"Oh, Charles," pleaded the poor lady in despair, "he has made restitution. Here's all that was yours—rings, guineas and all. Spare him, I implore you, for his kindness and consideration to me."

"He showed me nice consideration," said he, with a sneer, for he was now confident and a-swagger; "we will dispose of him with as gentle a consideration, madam."

And at that he moved to the door, I doubt not to summon the landlord; but I stepped in his way, for I was tired of his mustard looks and arrogance.

"Rot me," said I, "you mistake my kidney. If 'tis a gentleman of the road you have to deal with, you have yet to learn his quality."

He drew himself up, while the lady looked at me breathless. He was a vastly bigger man than I, but I drew my toasting-fork.

"Madam," said I to the lady, "you have a great heart, but it breaks itself too readily. I would not have that ample heart for half the kingdom. I'll warrant it troubles you. Here you be fretting yourself over this poor carcase which is worth no tears nor tremors, and moreover can look after itself ; and I will swear you waste your blood and tissue on this same hulk that I must spit, damn him ! Sir," says I to the man, "if ye will stand aside I will learn you to toast or roast as you will, your toes and midriff, afore this fire ; but if ye will not you shall taste the sawdust under the table. For I have an appointment in Bristol, and I wait no man's pleasure."

"You threaten me," says he, haughtily, and pulled out his sword.

"Oh, no," says I, "'tis but a plain statement. Will ye go by or go down ? Choose ye."

For answer he came at me, for the man was no coward, and did not lack spirit ; and we were presently engaged in the discharge of thrusts. He plied his blade not unskilfully, but, Lord, I have learned in a rough school, and 'twas not long ere I was under the cully's

guard and took him in the ribs. He collapsed like a log, and the lady uttered a scream, and flying to him bent over him. I dropped my point.

"Faith, my lady," said I, "'tis no more than letting of some of that superfluous blood that animates him. 'Twill fetch down his proud stomach, the which he needs. Let him bleed. 'Twill serve your turn also."

"Sir," says she, remembering me, even in her trouble and confusion, "you were best to go. Fly, fly! 'twas not your fault. He attacked you. Fly!"

Dear heart, there was none in those parts and on that night that might aspire to stop or catch Dick Ryder; but she knew not that, the innocent. I bowed to her.

"Give ye good cheer, madam," said I; "maybe I have served you better than ye think, first with the cold night, and second with the eclipse of this hot blood."

She threw me a wistful, wondering and pitiful glance, and then a groan drew her attention to her husband and she stooped over him tenderly.

At that I swung out of the door and sought my horse; and as I mounted Calypso, says I to the innkeeper, who attended me all unconscious, "I have stuck a point in that

muck-worm's shoulder," says I, " and ye had better relieve the lady's fears ; but," says I, as I rode off, " if I had stuck it in his gizzard, as I had a mind to do, 'twould have served her better." And with that I plunged into the wind and snow of the night.

GALLOWS GATE

’TWAS two o’clock of a bright mild March day that I cleared St Leonard’s Forest and came out upon the roads at the back of Horsham. I was for London, but chose that way by reason of a better security it promised, which, as it chanced, was a significant piece of irony. Horsham, a mighty quiet pretty town, lay in a blaze of the sun, enduring the sallies of a dusty wind, and feeling hot and athirst after my long ride I pulled up at an inn and dismounted.

“ Host,” says I, when I was come in, “ a pint of your best burgundy or canary to wash this dust adown ; and rip me if I will not have it laced with brandy.”

“ Why, sir,” says he, “ a cold bright day for horseback,” and shakes his head.

“ Damme, you’re right,” says I. “ Cold i’ the belly and hot in the groin. Here’s luck to the house, man,” and I tossed off the gallipot, though the brandy barely saved exceeding thin swipes that he had the impudence to pass for wine. “ Why, goodman, ye’ll make your

fortune on this," I said with a laugh and flung open the door to go out, when all of a sudden I came to a silence and a pause.

" 'Tis the officers," says the landlord, who was at my ear. " Gadslife, 'tis the sheriff's men from Lewes."

" Lewes!" says I, slowly. " What be they here for ? "

" Why," says he, in a flutter, " there was him that was taken for a tobyman by Guildford. He was tried at Lewes, and will hang."

" If he be fool enough to be taken, let him be hanged and be damned," says I, carelessly.

When I was got upon my horse I began to go at a walk down the High Street, for though, as was according to nature, I was inquisitive about the matter I was too wary to adventure ere I was sure of my ground. And this denial of unnecessary hazards, as is my custom, saved me from a mishap ; for as the procession wound along, the traps and the carriage between 'em, there was one of them that turned his head aside to give an order, and, rip me, if 'twas not that muck-worm traitor and canter, the thief-taker Timothy Grubbe. I had an old score with Timothy, the which I had sworn to pay ; but that was not the time nor the opportunity, and so I pulled in and lowered my head, lest by chance his evil eye

might go my way. As I did so, something struck on the mare's rump, and, looking back, I saw a young man a-horseback that had emerged from a side street.

"Whoa, there!" says I, cheerfully, "are you so blinded by March dust as not to see a gentleman when he goes by?"

He was a slight, handsome-looking youth, of a frank face but of a rustic appearance, and he stammered out an apology.

"Why, I did but jest," I said heartily, "think no more on't, particularly as 'twas my fault to have checked the mare of a sudden. But to say the truth I was gaping at the grand folks yonder."

He stared after the traps, and says he in an interested voice, "Who be they? Is it my Lord Blackdown?"

Now this comparison of that wry-necked, pock-faced villain Grubbe to a person of quality tickled me, but I answered, keeping a straight face,—

"Well, not exactly," says I, "not my lord, but another that should stand, or hang, as high maybe, and shall some day."

"Oh," says he, gazing at me, "a friend of yours, sir?"

He was of a ruddy colour, and his mouth was habitually a little open, giving him an

expression of perpetual wonder and innocence, so that, bless you, I knew him at once for what he was at heart—a simple fellow of a natural kindness, and one of no experience in the world, and a pretty dull wit.

“Not, as you might call him, a friend,” said I, gravely, “but rather one that has put an affront upon me.”

“You should wipe it out, sir,” says this innocent, seriously. “I would allow no man to put an affront on me, gad, I would not.”

“Why,” said I, dryly, “I bide my time, being, if I may say so, of less mustard and pepper than yourself. Nevertheless, it shall be wiped out to the last stain.”

“Gad, I like that spirit,” says he, briskly, and, as if it constituted a bond betwixt us, he began to amble slowly at my side. “If there is any mischief, sir,” says he, “I trust you will allow me to stand your friend.”

Here was innocence indeed, yet I could have clapped him on the back for a brick of good-fellowship and friendliness, and, relaxing my tone, I turned the talk on himself.

“You are for a journey ? ” says I.

He nodded, and his colour rose, but he frowned. “I am for Effingham,” said he.

“So am I,” said I, “at least I pass that way,” which was not so, for I was for Reading,

and had meant to go by Guildford. Yet I was in no mind to risk an encounter with Grubbe and his lambs, who were bound for Guildford, if what the innkeeper said was true, and the way by Effingham would serve me as well as another. He looked pleased, and says he,—

“ Why, we will travel in company,” says he.

“ With all my heart,” said I.

The traps had disappeared upon the Guildford road in a mist of dust, and we jogged on comfortably till we came to cross-roads, where we turned away for Slinfold, reaching that village nearby two of the clock. Here my companion must slake his thirst, and I was nothing loth. He had a gentlemanly air about him for all his rustic habit, and very pleasantly, if with some awkwardness, offered me of a bottle.

“ You mind me,” said I, drinking to him, for I liked the fellow, “ of a lad that I knew that was in the wars.”

“ Was you in the wars ? ” says he, eagerly.

I had meant the wars of the road, which indeed are as perilous and as venturesome as the high quarrels of ravening nations.

“ I served in Flanders,” said I.

“ My father fought for his gracious Majesty, Charles I.,” says he, quickly, “ and took a deep

wound at Marston Moor. There was never a braver man than Squire Masters of Rockham."

"I'll warrant his son is his spit," said I.

He bowed, as if he were at court. "Your servant, sir," says he, smiling well-pleased, and eyed me. "You have seen much service, sir?" he asked.

"Why, as much as will serve, Mr Masters," said I.

He looked at me shyly. "You have my name now," said he, and left his question in the air.

"You may call me Ryder," said I.

"You have had your company, sir?" he went on in a hesitating voice.

"Not always as good company as this," I replied laughing.

"I knew it," said he, eagerly. "You are Captain Ryder?"

"There have been those that have put that style on me," I answered, amused at his persistence.

"I am glad that I have met you, Captain," said this young fool, and put his arm in mine quite affectionately. "I have been unhappily kept much at home, and have seen less than I might of things beyond the hills. Not but what Sussex is a fine shire," he says with a sigh.

"Why, it is fine if so be your home be there," I replied.

"My home is there," he said, and paused, and again the frown wrinkled up his brow.

He said no more till we were in the saddle again and had gone some half a mile, and then he spoke, and I knew his poor brain had been playing pitch and toss with some thought.

"Captain Ryder," said he, abruptly, "you have travelled far and seen much. You might advise one junior to you on a matter of worldly wisdom."

Sink me (thinks I), what's the boy after; but says I gravely from a mutinous face, "You can hang your faith on me for an opinion or a blow, Mr Masters."

"Thank you," says he, heartily, and then thrust a hand into his bosom and rapidly stuck at me a document. "Read that, sir," said he, impulsively.

I opened it, and found 'twas writ in a woman's hand, and subscribed Anne Varley; and the marrow of it was fond affection. Why, 'twas but a common love-billet he had given me, of the which I have seen dozens and received very many—some from persons of quality that would astonish you. But what was I to do with this honest ninny and his

mistress ? I had no nose for it, and so said I, handing him back his letter,—

“ It has a sweet smack and 'tis pretty enough inditing.”

“ Ah,” says he, quickly, “ 'tis her nature, Captain—'tis her heart that speaks. Yet is she denied by her parents. They will have none of me.”

“ The more to their shame,” I said.

“ They aspire high,” says he, “ as Anne's beauty and virtues of themselves would justify. Yet she does love me, and I her, and we are of one spirit and heart. See you how she loves me, poor thing, poor silly puss ! And they would persuade her to renunciation. But she shall not—she shall not, I swear it,” he cried in excitement. “ She shall be free to choose whom she will.”

“ Spoken like a man of temper,” said I, approvingly. “ You will go win her forth-right.”

“ I am on my journey to accomplish that now,” says he. “ She has wrote in this letter, as you have seen, that her father dissuades her, and she signs her renunciation, adding sweet words of comfort that her affection will not die—no, never, never ; and that she will die virgin for me. Say you not, sir, that this is beautiful conduct, and say, am I not

right to ride forth and seize her from her unnatural parents, to make her mine?"

"Young gentleman," said I, being struck by his honest sincerity and his bubbling over, "were you brother to me, or I to Mrs Anne, you would have my blessing."

At that he glowed, and, his spirits having risen with this communication, he babbled on the road of many things cheerfully, but mostly of love and beauty, and the virtues of Mrs Anne of Effingham Manor.

I will confess that after a time his prattle wearied me; 'twas too much honey, and cloyed my palate. If he had known as much of the sex as has fallen to my lot he would have took another stand and sung in a lower key. Well, 'twas late in the afternoon when we reached the hills beyond Ewhurst and began to climb the rugged way to the top. The wind had gone down with the sun in a flurry of gold in the west to which the eastern breeze had beat all day; and over the head of Pitch Hill last year's heather still blazed in its decay. When we had got to the Windmill Inn that lies packed into the side of the hill and woods there we descended for refreshment, and I saw the horses stalled below for baiting. Now that house, little and quiet, perches in a lonely way in the pass of the hill,

and upon one side the ground falls so fast away that the eye carries over a precipitous descent towards the weald of Surrey and the dim hills by the sea. And this view was fading swiftly in the window under a bleak sky as Masters and I ate of our dinner in the upstairs room that looked upon it. He had a natural grace of mind, despite the rawness of his behaviour, and his sentiments emerged sometimes in a gush, as when, says he, looking at the darkening weald,—

“ I love it, Captain. ‘Tis mine. My home is there, and, God willing, Anne’s too shall be.”

“ Amen,” said I, heartily, for the boy had gone to my heart, absurd though he was.

And just on that there was a noise without the door, the clank of heavy feet rang on the boards, and Timothy Grubbe’s ugly mask disfigured the room.

He came forward a little with a grin on his distorted features, and, looking from one to the other of us, said he,—

“ My respects, Captain, and to this young plover that no doubt you’re plucking. By the Lord, Dick Ryder, but I had given you up! Heaven sends us good fortune when we’re least thinking of it.”

Masters at his word had started up. “ Who are you, sir, that intrudes on two gentlemen ? ”

he demanded with spirit. "I'll have you know this is a private room. Get you gone."

"Softly, man," says Grubbe in an insinuating voice, "but maybe I'm wrong, and you're two of a colour. Is it an apprentice, Dick, this brave lad that talks so bold and has such fine feathers ? "

"If you do not quit," said, I shortly, "I will spit your beauty for you in two ticks."

"Dick Ryder had always plenty heart," said he, in his jeering way ; "Dick had always a famous wit, and was known as a hospitable host. So I will take the liberty to invite to his sociable board some good fellows that are below, to make merry. We shall prove an excellent company, I'll warrant."

Masters took a step towards him. "Now, who the devil soever you may be, you shall not use gentlemen so," he said, whipping out his blade.

But Grubbe turned on him satirically. "As for you, young cockchafer," said he, "it bodes no good to find you in this company. But as you seem simpleton enough I'll give you five minutes to take your leave of this gentleman of the road. Dick, ye're a fine tobyman, and you have enjoyed a brave career, but your hour is struck."

I rose, but ere I could get to him young Masters had fallen on him.

“Defend yourself, damn ye!” he said, “you that insult a gentleman that is my friend. Put up your blade, curse you,” and he made at him with incredible energy.

Uttering a curse, Grubbe thrust with his point and took the first onrush, swerving it aside; and ere I could intervene they were at it. My young friend was impetuous, and, as I saw at once, none too skilful, and Grubbe kept his temper, as he always did. He stood with a thin, ugly smile, pushing aside his opponent’s blade for a moment or two, until, of a sudden, he drew himself up and let drive very low and under the other’s guard. The sword rattled from Masters’s hand and he went down on the floor. I uttered an oath.

“By God, for this you shall die, you swine,” said I, fiercely, and I ran at him; but, being by the door, he swept it open with a movement and backed into the passage.

“The boot is on t’other leg, Dick,” says he, maliciously. “’Tis you are doomed;” and, closing the door sharply behind him, he whistled shrilly.

I knew what he intended, and that his men were there, but I stooped over the boy’s body and held my fingers to his heart. ‘Twas dead

and still. I cursed Grubbe and started up. If I was not to be taken there was only the window looking on the deeps of the descending valley. I threw back the casement and leaped over the sill. Grubbe should perish, I swore, and, doubled now my oath. I could have wept for that poor youth that had died to avenge my honour. But my first business was my safety, and I crept down as far as I might, and dropped. By that time the catchpoles were crowding into the room above. I struck the slanting hill and fell backwards, but getting to my feet, which were very numb with the concussion of the fall, I sped briskly into the darkness, making for the woods.

I lay in the shelter of the woods an hour, and then resolved on a circumspection. 'Twas not my intention to leave the mare behind, if so be she had escaped Grubbe and his creatures, and moreover, I had other designs in my head. So I made my way back deviously to the inn, and reconnoitred. Stillness hung about it, and after a time I marched up to the door mighty cautiously and knocked on it.

The innkeeper opened it, and, the lamp burning in my face, started as if I were the devil.

"Hush, man," said I, "is the officer gone?" He looked at me dubiously, and

trembling. "Come," said I, for I knew the reputation of those parts, "I am from Shoreham Gap yonder, and I was near taken for an offence against the revenue."

"You are a smuggler?" said he, anxiously. "They said you were a tobyman."

"They will take away any decent man's name," said I. "Come, I want my horse. You have no fancy for preventive men, I'll guess."

And this was true enough, for he had a mine of cellars under his inn and through the roadway.

"But your friend?" said he, still wavering. "Him that is dead—"

"As good a man as ever rolled a barrel," said I.

He relaxed his grip of the door. "'Tis a sore business for me this night," he complained.

"Nay," said I, "for I will rid your premises of myself and friend, by your leave or without it," says I.

He seemed relieved at that, and I entered. The horses were safe, as I discovered, for Grubbe must have been too full of his own prime business to make search, and getting them out, I made my preparations. I strapped the lad's body in the stirrups, so that he lay forward on the horse with his head

a-wagging but (God deliver him !) his soul at rest. And presently we were on the road, and threading the wilderness of the black pine-woods for the vale below towards London.

The moon was a glimmering arc across the Hurtwood as I came out on the back of Shere, and pulling out of the long lane that gave entry to the village, reined up by the White Horse. From the inn streamed a clamour of laughter, and without the doorway, and well-nigh blocking it, was drawn up a carriage, with a coachman in his seat, that struck my eyes dimly in the small light. I was not for calling eyes on me with a dead man astride his horse, so I moved into the yard, thinking to drain a tankard of ale, if no better, before I took the road over the downs to Effingham. But I was scarce turned into the yard ere a light flung through the window peered on a face that changed all the notions in my skull. 'Twas Grubbe !

Leaving the horses by I went back to the front of the inn, and says I to the coachman that waited there, as I rapped loud on the door,—

“ ‘Tis shrewish to-night.”

“ Ay,” says he, in a grumbling, surly voice, “ I would the country were in hell.”

“ Why, so ‘twill be in good time,” said I,

cheerfully ; and then to the man that came, " Fetch me two quarts well laced with gin," says I, " for to keep the chill o' the night and the fear o' death out."

The coachman laughed a little stoutly, for he knew that this was his invitation.

" Whence come you then ? " said I, delivering him the pot that was fetched out.

He threw an arm out. " Lewes," said he, " under charge with a tobyman that was for chains yonder."

He nodded towards the downs and drank. I cast my eyes up and the loom of the hill just t'other side of the village was black and ominous.

" Oh," says I, " he hangs there ? "

" At the top of London road," says he, dipping his nose again. " There stands the gallows, where the roads cross, and near the gate."

" Gallows Gate," said I, laughing. " Well, 'twas a merry job enough."

" Ay," says he, " but by this we might ha' been far towards London Town, whither most of us are already gone. But 'twas not his meaning. He must come back with the Lewes sheriff and drink him farewell."

" Leaving a poor likely young man such as yourself to starve of cold and an empty

belly here," said I. "Well, I would learn such a one manners in your place ; and you shall have another tankard of dog's-nose for your pains," says I ; whereat I called out the innkeeper again, but took care that he had my share of the gin in addition to his own. By that time he was garrulous, and had lost his caution, so keeping him in talk a little, and dragging his wits along from point to point, I presently called to him,—

"Come down," said I, "and stamp your feet. 'Twill warm you without as the liquor within ;" and he did as I had suggested without demur.

"Run round to the back," says I, "and get yourself a noggin, and if so be you see a gentleman on horseback there asleep, why, 'tis only a friend of mine that is weary of his long journey. I will call you if there be occasion."

He hesitated a moment, but I set a crown on his palm and his scruples vanished. He limped into the darkness.

'Twas no more than two minutes later that I heard voices in the doorway, and next came Timothy Grubbe into the night, in talk with someone. At which it took me but thirty seconds to whip me into the seat and pull the coachman's cloak about me, so that I sat

stark and black in the starlight. Grubbe left the man he talked with and came forward.

“ You shall drink when ye reach Cobham, Crossway,” says he, looking up at me, “ and mind your ways, damn ye.”

And at that he made no more ado, but humming an air he lurched into the carriage. I pulled out the nags, and turned their heads so that they were set for the north. And then I whistled low and short—a whistle I knew that the mare would heed, and I trusted that she would bring her companion with her. Then the wheels rolled out upon the road and Timothy Grubbe and I were bound for London all alone.

As I turned up the London road that swept steeply up the downs I looked back, and behind the moon shone faintly on Calypso, and behind her on the dead man wagging awkwardly in his stirrups.

I pushed the horses up the steeps of the London road as fast as might be, but the ruts were still deep in mud, and the carriage jolted and rocked and swayed as we went. The wind came now with a little moaning sound from the bottom of the valley, and the naked branches creaked above my head, for that way was sunken and tangled with the thickets of nut and yew. And presently I was forced

to go at a foot pace, so abrupt was the height. The moon struck through the trees and peered on us, and Grubbe put his head forth of the window.

“ Why go you not faster, damn ye ? ” says he, being much in liquor.

“ 'Tis the hill, your honour,” said I.

He glanced up and down.

“ What is't comes up behind ? ” says he, shouting. “ There is a noise of horses that pounds upon the road.”

“ 'Tis the wind,” says I, “ that comes off the valley, and makes play among the branches.”

He sank back in his seat, and we went forward slowly. But he was presently out again, screaming on the night.

“ There is a horseman behind,” says he. “ What does he there ? ”

“ 'Tis a traveller, your honour,” say I, “ that goes, no doubt, by our road, and is bound for London.”

“ He shall be bound for hell,” says he, and falls back again.

The horses wound up foot by foot and emerged now upon a space of better light. I looked round, and there was Grubbe, with his head through the window and his eyes cast backwards.

“What fool is this,” says he, “that rides so awkwardly, and drives a spare horse? If he ride no better I will ask him to keep me company, if he be a gentleman. Many gentlemen have rode along of me, and have rode to the gallows tree,” and he chuckled harshly.

“Maybe he will ride with you to the Gallows Gate, sir,” says I.

“Why, Crossway,” says he, laughing loudly, “you have turned a wit,” says he; and once more withdrew his head.

By now we were nigh to the top of the down, and I could see the faint shadow of the Triple Beam. With that I knew my journey was done, and that my work must be accomplished. I pulled to the horses on the rise, and got down from my seat.

“Why d’ye stop, rascal?” called Grubbe in a fury, but I was by the door now and had it open.

“Timothy Grubbe,” said I, “ye’re a damned rogue that the devil your master wants, and he shall have ye.”

He stared at me in a maze, his nostrils working, and then says he in a low voice,—

“So ‘tis you.”

“Your time has come, Timothy,” said I, flinging off my cloak, and I took my sword. “Out with you, worm!”

He said never a word, but stepped forth and looked about him. He was sobered now, as I could see from his face, which had a strange look on it.

“Ye’re two rascals to one, Dick,” says he, slowly, looking on the dead man on his horse which had come to a stop in the shadows.

“No,” says I. “This gentleman will see fair play for us.”

Grubbe took a step backward. “Sir,” says he, addressing the dead man, but at that moment Calypso and her companion started and came into the open, and the moon shone on the face of the dead. Grubbe uttered a cry and turned on me. His teeth showed in a grin.

“No ghost shall haunt me, Dick,” says he. “Rather shall another ghost keep him company ;” and his wry neck moved horridly in the wan light.

I pointed upwards where the tobyman hung in chains, keeping his sheep by moonlight. “There’s your destiny,” said I, “there’s your doom. Now defend ye, damn ye, for I’ll not prick an adder at a disadvantage.”

He drew his blade, for no man could say that Timothy Grubbe, time-server, pander, and traitor as he was, lacked courage. Sud-

denly he sliced at me, but I put out and turned off the blow.

“If you will have it so soon,” said I, “in God’s name have it,” and I ran upon him.

My third stroke went under his guard and took him in the midriff. He gave vent to an oath, cursed me in a torrent, and struck at me weakly as he went down. He was as dead as mutton almost ere he reached the ground.

I have never been a man of the Church, nor do I lay any claim to own more religion than such as to make shift by when it comes to the end. No, nor no I deny that I have sundry offences on my conscience, some of which I have narrated in my memoirs. But when it comes to a reckoning I will make bold to claim credit in that I rid the world he had encumbered of Timothy Grubbe—the foulest ruffian that ever I did encounter in the length of my days on the roads.

I climbed the beam and lowered the poor tobyman, and it took me but a little time to make the exchange. The one I left where he had paid quittance in the peace of this earth, and t’other a-swinging under the light of the moon on Gallows Gate.

I have said my journey was done, but that was not so. There was more for me to do,

which was to deliver poor Masters at his lady-love's and break the unhappy news. And so, leaving the carriage where it stood, with the patient horses, that were cropping the grass, I mounted the mare and began to go down the long span of the downs to the north. 'Twas late—near midnight—when I reached Effingham and found my way to the manor. I rapped on the door, leaving Calypso and t'other in the shadows by the house, and presently one answered to my knock. "What is it ?" says she.

"'Tis a stranger," says I, "that has news of great import for Mrs Anne Varley, whom I beg you will call."

"She cannot hear you," said she, "'tis her wedding-night."

"What!" said I, in amazement, and instantly there flowed in upon me the meaning of this. Damn all women, save one or two, thinks I. And I turned to the maid again, with my mind made up.

"Look you, wench," said I, "this is urgent. I have an instant message that presses. And if so be your mistress will bear with me a moment and hold discourse, I'll warrant she shall not regret it—nor you," says I, with a crown piece in my palm.

She hesitated, and then, "Maybe she will

refuse," says she. "She hath but these few hours been wed."

"Not she," said I, "if you will tell her that I bring good news, great news—news that will ease her spirit and send her to her bridal bed with a happy heart."

At that she seemed to consent, and with my coin in her hand she disappeared into the darkness of the house. It must have been some ten minutes later that a light flashed in the hall, and a voice called to me. "Who is it?" it asked, "and what want you at this hour?"

I looked at her. She was of a pretty face enough, rather pale of colour, and with eyes that moved restlessly and measured all things. Lord, I have known women all my life in all stations, and I would have pinned no certainty on those treacherous eyes. She was young too, but had an air of satisfaction in herself, and was in no wise embarrassed by this interview. I had no mercy on her, with her oaths of constancy writ in water that feigned to be tears, and her false pretences.

"Madam," said I, civilly, "I hear you're wed to-day to a gentleman of standing."

"What is that to you, sir?" she asked quickly.

"'Tis nothing, for sure," said I, "but to a

friend of mine that I value deeply 'tis much."

" You speak of Mr Masters," said she, sharply, and with discomposure. " Sure, if he be a gentleman he will not trouble me when he knows."

" Anne ! " cried a voice from the top of the stairs, " Anne ! "

'Twas her bridegroom calling. Well, she should go to him in what mood she might when I had done with her.

" He will never know," says I, " unless he have it from yourself."

" Anne ! " says the voice above the stairs.

" He shall not—I will not," she cried angrily. " I will not be persecuted, 'twas all a mistake."

I whistled, and Calypso emerged from the night, and behind Calypso was the horse with its burden.

An anxious look dawned in her face. " I am insulted—" says she, and paused quickly. " Edward ! " she called, and put a hand to her bosom.

" Anne, my dove ! " cried the voice, " where are you ? Come, child, 'tis late."

The horses came to a stop before the door, with the body in the saddle, bound to the crupper.

" What is it ? " she cried in alarm, and

suddenly she shrieked out, clutching at the door-post. "It is an omen—my wedding-night."

"Ay," says I, "which be your bridegroom, he that calls out or he that is silent ? Call on him and he hears not."

Peal after peal went up now from her, and the house was awake with alarm. I turned away, leaving her on the door-step, and mounted the mare. As I cantered off into the night I cast a glance behind me, and in that group lay Mrs Anne fallen in a swoon, with the sleeping figure on the horse before her.

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